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His first book, *Appointment in Samarra*, was followed by *Butterfield 8*, *Pal Joey*, *A Rage to Live*, *The Farmer's Hotel*, *Sweet and Sour*, *Ten North Frederick* (which won the American 'National Book Award' for the best novel published in 1955), *A Family Party*, *From the Terrace*, *Ourselfs to Know*, *Sermons and Soda Water*, and *The Champagne Pool*.

Mr. O'Hara is married and has a daughter.

Cover drawing by Adrian Bailey

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Starting on December 16th, a distinguishing numeral
will be added to, and become part of, each central
office in New York City. For example
HANOVER will become HANOVER 2

*From an advertisement of the New York Telephone Company,
8 December 1930*

Chapter 1

ON this Sunday morning in May, this girl who later was to be the cause of a sensation in New York awoke much too early for her night before. One minute she was asleep, the next she was completely awake and dumped into despair. It was the kind of despair that she had known perhaps two thousand times before, there being 365 mornings in a calendar year. In general the cause of her despair was remorse, two kinds of it: remorse because she knew that whatever she was going to do next would not be any good either. The specific causes of these minutes of terror and loneliness were not always the words or deeds which seemed to be the causes. Now, this year, she had come pretty far. She had come far enough to recognize that what she had done or said last night did not stand alone. Her behaviour of a given night before, which she was liable to blame for the despair of any today, frequently was bad, but frequently was not bad enough to account for the extreme depth of her despair. She recognized, if only vaguely and then only after conquering her habit of being dishonest with herself, that she had got into the habit of despair. She had come far away from original despair, because she had hardened herself into the habit of ignoring the original, basic cause of all the despair she could have in her lifetime.

There *was* one cause.

But for years she had hardened herself against thinking of it, in the hope of pushing it away from her and drawing herself away from it. And so mornings would come, sometimes as afternoons, and she would awake in despair and begin to wonder what she had done before going to sleep that made her so full of terror today. She would recollect and for a fraction of a fraction of a second she would think, 'Oh, yes, I remember,' and build up an explanation on the recollection of the recognizably bad thing she had done. And then would follow a period of inward cursing and screaming, of whispering vile self-accusation. There was nothing she knew of that she would not call herself during these fierce rages of self-accusation. She would whisper and whisper the things men say to other men when they want to incite to kill. In time this would

exhaust her physically, and that left her in a state of weak defiance - but not so weak that it would seem weak to anyone else. To anyone else she was defiance; but she knew that it was only going on. You just go on.

For one thing, you get up and get dressed. On this Sunday morning she did something she often did, which gave her a little pleasure. The drawstring of the pyjamas she was wearing had come undone in the night, and she opened the pyjamas and laughed. She said to herself: 'I wonder where he is.'

She got out of bed, holding the pyjamas to her, and she was unsteady and her body was pretty drunk, but she walked all over the apartment and could not find him. It was a large apartment. It had one large room with a grand piano and a lot of heavy, family furniture and in one corner of that room, where there was a bookshelf, there were a lot of enlarged snapshots of men and women and boys and girls on horseback or standing beside saddle horses. There was one snapshot of a girl in a tandem cart, a hackney hitched to it, but if you looked carefully you could see that there was a tiestrap, probably held by a groom who was not in the picture. There were a few prize ribbons in picture frames, blues from a Connecticut county fair. Some pictures of yachts, which, had she examined them carefully, the girl would have discovered were not many yachts but duplicate snapshots of the same Sound Inter-Club yacht. One picture of an eight-oared shell, manned; and one picture of an oarsman holding a sweep. This picture she inspected closely. His hair was cut short, he was wearing short, heavy woollen socks, a cotton shirt with three buttons at the neck, and a small letter over the heart, and his trunks were bunched in the very centre by his jock strap and what was in it. She was surprised that he would have a picture like that hanging in this room, where it must be seen by growing girls. 'But they'd never recognize him from that picture unless someone told them who it was.'

There was a dining-room almost as large as the first room. The room made her think of meats with thick gravy on them. There were four bedrooms besides the one where she had slept. Two of them were girls' bedrooms, the third a servant's room, and the fourth was a woman's bedroom. In this she lingered.

She went through the closets and looked at the clothes. She looked at the bed, neat and cool. She took whiffs of the bottles on

the dressing table, and then she opened another closet door. The first thing she saw was a mink coat, and it was the only thing she really saw.

She left the room and went back to his room and picked up her things; her shoes and stockings, her panties, her evening gown. 'Well, I can't wear that. I can't go out looking like that. I can't go out in broad daylight wearing an evening gown and coat.' The evening coat, more accurately a cape, was lying where it had been carefully laid in a chair. But when she took a second look at the evening gown she remembered more vividly the night before. The evening gown was torn, ripped in half down the front as far as the waist. 'The son of a bitch.' She threw the gown on the floor of one of his closets and she took off her pyjamas - *his* pyjamas. She took a shower and dried herself slowly and with many towels, which she threw on the bathroom floor, and then she took his tooth brush and put it under the hot water faucet. The water was too hot to touch, and she guessed it was hot enough to sterilize the brush. This made her laugh: 'I go to bed with him and take a chance on getting anything, but I sterilize his tooth brush.' She brushed her teeth and used a mouth wash, and she mixed herself a dose of fruit salts and drank it pleurably. She felt a lot better and would feel still better soon. The despair was going away. Now that she knew what the bad thing was that she was going to do, she faced it and felt all right about it. She could hardly wait to do it.

She put on her panties and shoes and stockings and she brushed her hair and made up her face. She used little make-up. She opened a closet door and put her hand in the pockets of his evening clothes, but did not find what she wanted. She found what she wanted, cigarettes, in a case in the top drawer of a chest of drawers. She lit one and went to the kitchen. On the kitchen table was an envelope she had missed in her earlier round of the apartment. 'Gloria' was written in a round, backhand style, in pencil.

She pulled open the flap which was sticky and not tightly held to the envelope, and she took out three twenty-dollar bills and a note. 'Gloria - This is for the evening gown. I have to go to the country. Will phone you Tuesday or Wednesday. Hope I'm not telling me,' she said, aloud.

Now she moved a little faster. She found ~~the~~ ^{two} identical black felt, in one of the girls' closets.

She is thinking she took the car to the country and took it. She was aware of herself as a comic spectacle in shoes and stockings, panties, black hat. 'But we'll soon fix that.' She returned to the woman's closet and took out the mink coat and got into it. She then went to his bedroom and put the sixty dollars in her small crystal-covered evening bag. She was all set.

On the way out of the apartment she stopped and looked at herself in a full length mirror in the foyer. She was amused. 'If it wasn't spring this would be just dandy. But - not bad anyway.'

She was amused going down in the elevator. The elevator operator wasn't handsome, but he was tall and young, a German, obviously. It amused her to think of what would happen to his face if she opened the mink coat. 'Shall I get you a taxi, miss?' he said, without turning all the way around.

'Yes, please,' she said. He would not remember her if anyone asked him to describe her. He would remember her as pretty, as giving the impression of being pretty, but he would be a bad one to ask for a good description. All he would remember would be that she was wearing a mink coat, and anyone who wanted to get a description of her would know already that she had been wearing a mink coat. That would be the only reason anyone would ask him for a description of her. He was not the same man who had been running the elevator when she came in the apartment house the night before; that had been an oldish man who did not take his uniform cap off in the elevator. She remembered the cap. And so this young man naturally did not question her wearing a mink coat now instead of the velvet coat she had worn coming in. Why, of course! He probably didn't even know what apartment she had come from.

She waited for him to precede her to the big iron-and-glass doors of the house, and watched him holding up his finger for a taxi. She decided against tipping him for this little service - that would make him remember her - and she got in the taxi and sat back in the corner where he could not see her.

'Where to, ma'am?' said the driver.

'Washington Square. I'll tell you where to stop.' She would direct him to one of the Washington Square apartment houses and pay him off, and then go in and ask for a fictitious person, and stall long enough for the driver of this taxi to have gone away.

Then she would come out and take another taxi to Horatio Street. She would pay a surprise call on Eddie. Eddie would be burned up, because he probably would have a girl there; Sunday morning. She was in good spirits and as soon as she got rid of this cab she would go to Jack's and buy a quart of Scotch to take to Eddie and Eddie's girl. At the corner of Madison the driver almost struck a man and girl, and the man yelled and the driver yelled back. 'Go on, spit in their eye,' called Gloria.

*

In the same neighbourhood another girl was sitting at one end of a rather long refectory table. She was smoking, reading the paper, and every once in a while she would lay the cigarette in an ash tray and, with her free hand, rub the damp short hair at the back of her neck. The rest of her hair was dry, but there was a line deep in the skin of her head and neck that showed where a bathing cap had been. She would rub her hair, trying to dry it, then she would wipe her fingers on the shoulder part of her dressing gown, and her fingers would slide along the front of her body and halt at her breast. She would hold her hand so that it partly covered her breast and the fingers rested under her arm, in the arm-pit. Then she would have to turn a page of the paper and she would pick up the cigarette again and for a while she would hold it until the heat of the lighted end warned her that it was time to get a shorter hold on the cigarette or get burned fingers. She would put it in the ash tray and start all over again with the rubbing of the hair at the back of her neck.

Presently she got up and was gone from the room. When she came back she was naked except for a brassière and panties. She did not go back to the table, but stood on one foot and knelt with the other knee on a chair and looked out the windows that ran the length of the room. She was in this position when a bell rang, and she went to the kitchen.

'Hello . . . Ask him to come up, please.'

She walked hurriedly to the bedroom and came out pulling a cashmere sweater over her shoulders and wearing a tweed skirt, light wool stockings, and brogue shoes with Scotch tongues that flapped a little. Another bell rang, and she went to the door.

'Greetings. Greetings, greetings, and greetings. How is Miss Stannard? How is Miss Stannard?'

'Hello, Jimmy,' said the girl. She closed the door, and immediately he took her in his arms and kissed her.

'Mm. No response,' he said. He tossed his hat in a chair and sat down before she did. He offered her a cigarette by gesture and she declined it with a shake of her head.

'Coffee?' she said.

'Yes, I'll have some coffee if it's any good.'

'Well, I made it and I drank two cups of it. It's fit to drink, at least.'

'Ah, but you made it. I doubt if you'd throw away coffee you made yourself.'

'Do you want some or don't you?'

'Just a touch. Just one cup of piping hot javver for the gentleman in the blue suit.'

'How about the blue suit? Didn't you get What's His Name's car? I thought we were going to the country.' She looked down at her own clothes and then at his. He had on a blue serge suit and white starched collar and black shoes. 'Did you get a job in Wall Street since I last saw you?'

'I did not. That goes for both questions. I did not get the car from Norman Goodman, not What's His Name. You met him the night we went to Michel's and you called him Norman. And as for my getting a job in Wall Street - well, I won't even answer that. Norman phoned me last night and said he had to drive his father to a circumcision or something.'

'Is his father a rabbi?'

'Oh - don't be so - no, dear. His father is not a rabbi, and I made that up about the circumcision.'

'What are we going to do? You didn't get someone else's car, I take it. Such a grand day to go to the country.'

'I am in the chips. I thought we could go to the Plaza for breakfast, but seeing as you've had breakfast. I'm supposed to be covering a sermon, but I should cover a Protestant sermon on a nice day like this. I don't know why they ever send me anyway. They get the sermons at the office, and all I ever do is go to the damn church and then I go back to the office and copy the sermon or paste it up. All I do is write a lead, like "The depression has awakened the faith of the American people, according to the Reverend Makepeace John Meriwether, don't spell it with an *a* or you're fired,

rector of Grace Methodist Episcopal Free Patrick's Cathedral." And so on. May I have some cream?"

'I'm afraid I've used up all the cream. Will milk do?'

'Damn, you have a nice figure, Isabel. Move around some more. Walk over to the window.'

'I will not.' She sat down. 'What do you really contemplate doing?'

'No Plaza? Not even when I'm in the chips?'

'Why are you rich?'

'I sold something to the *New Yorker*.'

'Oh, really? What?'

'Well, about a month ago I was on a story up near Grant's Tomb and I discovered this houseboat colony across the river. People live there in these houseboats all winter long. They have gas and electricity and lights and radios, and all winter the houseboats are mounted on piles, wooden piles. Then in the spring they get a tug to tow them out to Rockaway or some such place, and they live out there all summer. I thought it would make a good story for the Talk of the Town department so I found out all about it and sent it in, and yesterday I got a check for thirty-six dollars, which comes in mighty handy. They want me to do some more for them.'

'You're going to do it, aren't you?'

'I guess so. Of course I can't do a great deal, because believe it or not I have a job, and the novel.'

'How's the novel coming?'

'Like Santa Claus. And you know about Santa Claus.'

'I think I'll leave you.'

'Permanently?'

'A few more like that last one and yes, permanently. Such a lovely day to go to the country.' She got up and stood at the window. 'Look at those men. I never get tired of watching them.'

'What men? I'm too comfortable to get up and look at men. You tell me about them.'

'The men with the pigeons. They stay up on the roof all day, every Sunday, and chase the pigeons off. Our maid said the idea is that a man has a flock of pigeons, say eighteen, and the reason he chases them off is that he hopes that when they come back

here'll be nineteen or twenty. A pigeon or two from another flock gets confused and joins them, and increases the man's flock. It isn't exactly stealing.'

'But you won't have breakfast at the Plaza?'

'I've had breakfast, and I'll bet you have too.'

'As much as I ever have. Orange juice, toast and marmalade, coffee. I just thought we'd have kidneys and stuff, omelette, fried potatoes. Like the English. But if you don't want to, we won't. I just thought it'd be fun, or at least different.'

'Some other time. But I'll dress and we can spend your money some other way, if you insist.'

'I am not unmindful of the fact that I owe you ten dollars.'

'We'll spend that first. Now I'll go dress.'

He picked up a few sections of the paper. 'The *Times*!' he shouted. 'You'll never see my stories in the *Times*. What's the idea?' But she had closed the door of the bedroom. In ten minutes she reappeared.

'Mm. Nice. Nice. Mm.'

'Like it?'

'It's the best dress I've ever seen. And the hat, too. It's a cute little hat. I think girls' hats are better this year than they've ever been. They're so damn *cute*. I guess it has something to do with the way they do their hair.'

'I guess it has a whole lot to do with the way they do their hair. Mine's still damp and looks like the wrath of God, and that's your fault. I wouldn't have taken a shower if I'd known we weren't going to the country. I'd have had a real bath and wouldn't have got my hair wet. Remind me to stop at a drug store -'

'Darling, I'm so glad!'

'- for a decent bathing cap. Jimmy, before we go, I want to tell you again, for the last time you've got to stop saying things like that to me. I'm not your mistress, and I'm not a girl off the streets, and I'm not accustomed to being talked to that way. It isn't funny, and no one else talks that way to me. Do you talk that way to the women on newspapers? Even if you do I'm sure they don't really like it all the time. You can't admire my dress without going into details about my figure, and -'

'Why in the name of Christ should I? Isn't the whole idea of the dress to show off your figure? Why does it look well on you? Be-

cause you have nice breasts and everything else. Now God damn it, why shouldn't I say so?'

'I think you'd better go.' She took off her hat and sat down.

'All right, I'll go.' He picked up his hat and walked heavily down the short hall to the door of the apartment. But he did not open the door. He put his hand on the knob, and then turned around and came back.

'I didn't say anything,' she said.

'I know. And you didn't move. I know. You know I could no more walk out that door than I could walk out those windows. Will you please forgive me?'

'It will happen all over again, the same thing, the same way, same reason. And then you'll come back and ask me to forgive you, and I will. And every time I do, Jimmy, I hate myself. Not because I forgive you, but because I hate those words, I hate to be talked to that way, and I know, I *know* the only reason you do talk to me like that is because I *am* the kind of girl you talk to that way, and that's what I hate. Knowing that.'

'Darling, that's not true. You're not any kind of girl. You're you, Isabel. And won't you ever believe me when I tell you what I've told you so often? That no matter what we do, whenever I see you like this, in the morning, in the daytime, when there are other people - I can't believe that you're my girl. Or that you ever were. And you're so lovely in that dress, and hat. I'm sorry I'm the way I am.'

'You wouldn't talk to Lib that way. Or Caroline.'

'I wouldn't talk to them *any* way. I couldn't be annoyed. Let's go before I say something else wrong.'

'All right. Kiss me. Not hard.' She put out her hand and he pulled her out of the chair until she stood close to him.

'I *have* to kiss you hard. Me not kiss you hard? Impossible.' He laughed.

'Not quite impossible,' she said. 'There are times.' She laughed.

'Now I don't want to go,' he said.

'We're going. See if I have my key.' She rummaged in her bag. 'Yep. Lipstick, Jimmy. Here, I'll do it. Me your handkerchief. There.'

He held the door open for her and with his free hand he made as if to take a whack at her behind, but he did not touch her. She

rang for the elevator and after it groaned and whirred a while the door opened.

'Good morning, Miss Stannard,' said the elevator man.

'Good morning,' she said. They got in and the car began its descent, but stopped one floor below, and a man and woman got in. The man was precisely the same height as the woman, which made him seem smaller.

'Good morning, Mr Farley, Mrs Farley,' said the elevator man.

'Good morning,' said the Farleys.

None of the passengers looked at one another. They looked at the elevator man's shoulders. No one spoke until the ground floor was reached, then Isabel smiled and allowed Mrs Farley to leave the car first, then she followed, then Farley nodded to the open door and indicated with his eyes that Jimmy should go first - and was obviously surprised when Jimmy did go first. But the Farleys beat them to the door and the doorman was standing there with the large door of their car open for them. The car, a Packard four-passenger convertible, sounded like some kind of challenge of power, and not unlike the exhaust of a speedboat gurgling into the water.

'And to think we walk while punks like those people ride in a wagon like that. Never mind, all that will be changed, all that will be changed. I guess you know who made the loudest noise in Union Square the day before yesterday.'

'I guess I do,' said Isabel.

'I don't think I like your tone. Somehow, I don't quite like your tone,' but he began to whistle and she began to sing: 'Take me back to Man-hattan, that dear-old, dirty, town.'

At Madison Avenue they were almost struck by a huge Paramount taxi, and when Jimmy swore at the driver, the driver said, 'Go on, I'll spit in your eye.' And both Isabel and Jimmy distinctly heard the lone passenger, a girl in a fur coat, call to the driver: 'Go on, spit in their eye.' The cab beat the light and sped south in Madison.

'Nice girl,' said Isabel. 'Did you know her?'

'How would I know her? She's someone from this neighbourhood obviously. Downtown we don't talk that way, not in the Village.'

'No, of course not, except I could point out that the taxi is on its way downtown, in a hurry.'

'All right, point it out. And then for a disagreeable couple I give you the man and woman in the elevator. Mr Princeton with the glasses and his wife. I'll bet they're battling right this minute in that beautiful big chariot. I'd rather know a girl that yells out of a taxi, "Spit in their eye," than two polite people that can't wait to be alone before they're at each other's throats.'

'Well, that's the difference between you and me. I'd rather live in this part of town, where the people at least -'

'I didn't say anything about living with them, or having them for neighbours. All I said was I'd rather know that kind of girl - that girl - than those people. That's all I said.'

'Still stick to my statement. I'd rather *know* the man and his wife. As a matter of fact I happen to know who they are. He's an architect.'

'And I don't really give a damn who they are, but I do give a damn who the girl is.'

'A girl who would wear a mink coat on a day like this. She's cheap.'

'Well, with a mink coat she must have come high at some time.'

He was silent a few seconds before continuing. 'You know what I'm thinking, don't you? No, you don't. But I'd like to say it if you'd promise not to get sore? . . . I was just thinking what a powerful sexual attraction there is between us, otherwise why do we go on seeing each other when we quarrel so much?'

'We only quarrel, if you'll look back on it, we only quarrel for one reason, really, and that's the way you talk to me.'

He said nothing, and they walked on in silence for several blocks.

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When Sunday morning came Paul Farley never liked to be alone with his wife, nor did Nancy Farley like to be alone with Paul. The Farleys were Roman Catholic, although when they were married, in the fourth summer after the war, you would not have been able to guess from their dossiers in the newspapers, without looking at their names, that the wedding was taking place in the Church

of St Vincent Ferrer. Of Paul it was said: 'He attended Lawrenceville School and Princeton and served overseas as second lieutenant in a machine gun company of the 27th Division. He is a member of the Association of Ex-Members of Squadron A, the Princeton Club and the Racquet and Tennis Club.' Of Nancy it said: 'Miss McBride, who is a member of the Junior League, attended the Brearley School and Westover, and she was introduced to society last season at a dance at the Colony Club and later at the Bachelors' Cotillon in Baltimore, Md.'

After their marriage they had children, three of them; rapid-fire; but when the third, a girl, died, Nancy, who had wanted a girl very much, came to a decision. It was a major adjustment in her life. Up to that time Nancy had been a girl who always did what people told her to do. A succession of people: her mother, to a lesser degree her father, a nurse, a governess, her teachers, and the Church. The odour of sanctity was faint but noticeable in the McBride household, as Nancy's paternal uncle had been quite a good friend of the late Cardinal Gibbons; and the McBrides, as they themselves put it, realized their position. It was a religious household, including the servants, and at the time of Nancy's various debuts the big house in the East Seventies still had its quota of holy pictures, and there was hardly a bureau which did not contain one drawer full of broken rosary beads, crucifixes with the corpus missing. Father Lasance's *My Prayer Book*, *The Ordinary of the Mass*, and other prayer books for special occasions. One of Nancy's losing battles against the domination of her elders (and they were all defeats) was fought for the removal of a small, white china holywater font which hung at the door of her bedroom. She finally capitulated because a Westover friend who was visiting her was curious and delighted by the sacred article.

Nancy was the youngest of four children. The first born, Thornton, was ten years older than Nancy. He was out of a high-priced Catholic prep school, Yale, and Fordham Law School. He was with his father in the law firm and cared about nothing except the law and golf.

Next in age was Nancy's only sister, Mollie. She was eight years older than Nancy, and when Nancy was married Mollie was in the Philippines, living the life of an army officer's wife.

Two years younger than Mollie was Jay - Joseph, but always

known as Jay. He was unable to finish prep school, and had lived almost all his life, from the time he developed a case of T.B., in New Mexico. He was at work on a monumental history of the Church and the Indian in the south-west.

There would have been a child between Jay and Nancy, but it had been a Fallopian pregnancy from which Nancy's mother almost died. This was kept from Nancy not only all through her girlhood, but even after she was married and had her own two children. Nancy did not know about her mother's disastrous Fallopian pregnancy for the reason that her mother did not quite know how to explain it. It was kept quiet until Nancy's little girl died in early infancy, and then Mrs McBride told her. It infuriated Nancy to be told so late in life. It might not have made any difference in her attitude toward having children, but it gave her the feeling of having been insulted from a distance, this taciturnity of her mother's. People ought to tell you things like that. Your own mother ought to tell you everything about that - and then she would recall that what ought to be and what actually was were two quite different things so far as her mother and sex were concerned. Mrs McBride accepted the working theory of the Church that sex education of children was undesirable, unsanctioned; and when Nancy was fourteen her mother told her that 'this is something that happens to girls' - and that was all she ever told her until Paul and Nancy were to be married. Then Mrs McBride provided the second piece of information to her daughter: 'Never let Paul touch you when you are unwell.' Whatever else Nancy learned was from the exchange of knowledge among school acquaintances, and from her secret reading of the informative little propaganda pamphlets which the government got out during the World War, telling in detail the atrocities which the Germans committed upon Belgian maidens, nuns, priests, old women. These pamphlets did not incite Nancy to turn her allowance into Liberty Bonds, but they made her understand things about her anatomy and the anatomy of the young men with whom she swam summer after summer on the South Shore of Long Island.

Sex had been healthy and normally strong and only a trifle unpleasant for Nancy up to the time of the death of her daughter. Paul was considerate and tender and fun. Childbearing, the

incomparable peace of nursing the boys, the readjustment after the nursing periods – all were accomplished with a minimum of fright and pain, and sometimes with a pleasure that – especially at nursing time – was heavenly joy, because at such times Nancy felt so practically religious. She wanted to have a lot of children, and she was glad that things were that way: that the Church approved and that there was such high pleasure in motherhood. Then the little girl died and for the first time Nancy discovered that you cannot blame your body alone for the hell it sometimes gives you. Nancy broke with Rome the day her baby died. It was a secret break, but no Catholic breaks with Rome casually.

*

The man carrying the black Gladstone refused the help of the Red Caps. Who wanted a little thing like that carried for him? A little thing like that. What did they think? Did they think he wasn't strong enough to carry it? Didn't he look strong enough to carry a little bag, a little Gladstone like this? Did they think he wasn't young enough to carry a bag like this? Did they think he – they didn't think he was old, did they? Huh. If they thought that they had another think coming, by Jove. Ablative of Jupiter. They were young and looked pretty strong, most of these Red Caps, but the man drew a deep breath as he walked rapidly up the ramp and out into the great station. He would wager he was as strong as most of them. He could break them in half, and they thought he was old and wanted to carry his little Gladstone! He thought of how they would look on a chain gang, with the sweat pouring down on their satiny hides. Satiny hides. That was good. Ugh. He wanted to be sick, he wanted to think away from bodies; he patted his belly and pinched his Phi Beta Kappa key and started to curl the watch-chain around his finger, but this was somehow getting back again to the things of the flesh, and he wanted to think away from things of the flesh. He wanted to think of the ablative, the passive periphrastic, the middle voice, the tangent and cotangent, the School Board meeting next Tuesday. . . . He wished he hadn't thought of the School Board meeting next Tuesday or any Tuesday. He wished he'd always thought of the School Board meeting next Tuesday.

He got into a taxi and gave the address, and the driver was so

slow starting the meter that the man repeated the address. The driver nodded, showing half his face. The man looked at the face and at the driver's picture. They didn't look much alike, but they never did. He supposed this was a reputable taxicab company that operated the taxicabs at the station. Oh, well, that wasn't important.

'If only I'd always thought of the School Board meetings I wouldn't be here now, in a filthy New York taxicab, living a lie by being in this city on a cooked-up pretext. Living a worse, worse lie by having any reason to be here. God damn that girl! I am a good man. I am a bad man, a wicked man, but she is worse. She is really bad. She is bad, she is badness. She is Evil. She not only is *evil*, but she is Evil. Whatever I am now is her fault, because that girl is bad. Whatever I was before, the bad me, was nothing. I never was bad before I knew her. I sinned, but I was not bad. I was not corrupted. I did not want to come to New York before I knew her. She made me come to New York. She makes me trump up excuses to come to New York, makes me lie to my wife, fool my wife, that good woman, that poor good woman. That girl is bad, and hell's fire is not enough for her. Oh, *more* fresh air! It is good, this fresh air, even in a taxicab. Fresh air taxicab! God! Amos and Andy. Here I'm thinking of Amos and Andy, and all that they mean. Home. Seven o'clock. The smell of dinner in preparation, ready to be served when Amos and Andy go off the air. Am I the man who loves to listen to Amos and Andy?' The door opened and he got out and paid the driver.

Chapter 2

THE young man got out of bed and went to the kitchenette and pushed the wall button that unlatched the front door. He was in his underwear, one-piece cotton underwear and it had not been fresh the day before. He ruffled his hair and yawned, standing at the door and waiting until whoever it was that rang would ring the apartment bell. It rang, and he opened it half a foot.

'Oh,' he said, and opened the door all the way.

'Hel-lo, darling, look what I brought you.' Gloria held up the parcel, a wrapped-up bottle.

'Oh,' he said, and yawned again. 'Thanks.' He went back to the bed and lay on it face down. 'I don't want any.'

'Get up. It's a lovely spring morning,' said Gloria. 'I didn't think you'd be alone.'

'Uh. I'm alone. I haven't any soda. You'll have to drink that straight, or else with plain water. I don't want any.'

'Why?'

'I got drunk.'

'What for?'

'Oh, I don't know. Listen, Gloria, I'm dead. Do you mind if I go to sleep a little while?'

'Certainly I do. Where are your pyjamas? Did you sleep in your underwear?'

'I haven't any pyjamas. I have two pairs and they're both in the laundry. I don't even know what laundry.'

'Here. Here's twenty dollars. Buy yourself some pyjamas tomorrow, or else find the laundry and pay what you owe them.'

'I've some money.'

'How much?'

'I don't know.'

'Well, take this, you'll need it. I don't believe you have any money, either.'

'Why are you suddenly rich? Isn't that a new coat?'

'Yes. Brand-new. You didn't ask me to take it off. Is that hospitable?'

'Good God, you'd take it off if you wanted to. Take it off, if you want to.'

'Look,' she said, for he was closing his eyes again. She opened the coat.

He suddenly had the expression of a man who has been struck and cannot strike back. 'All right,' he said. 'You stole the coat.'

'He tore my dress, my new evening dress. I had to have something to wear in the daytime. All I had was my evening coat, and I couldn't go out wearing that.'

'I guess I will have a drink.'

'Good.'

'Who is the guy?'

'You don't know him.'

'How do you know I don't know him? Damn it, why don't you just tell me who it is and save time? You always do that. I ask you something and you say I wouldn't know, or you talk around it or beat about the bush for an hour, and you make me so Goddamn mad – and then you tell me. If you'd tell me in the first place we'd save all this.'

'All right, I'll tell you.'

'Well, go ahead and *tell* me!'

'His name is Weston Liggett.'

'Liggett? Liggett. Weston Liggett. I do know him.'

'You don't. How would you know him?'

'I don't know him, but I know who he is. He's a yacht racer and he used to be a big Yale athlete. Very social. Oh, and married. I've seen his wife's name. What about that? Where did you go?'

'His apartment.'

'His apartment? Is his wife – does she like girls?' He was fully awake now. 'Did she give you the coat? You're going in for that again, are you?'

'I think you're disgusting.'

'You think *I'm* disgusting. That's what it is. That's started again, all over again. That's why you came here, because you thought I had someone here. You know where you ought to be? You ought to be in an insane asylum. They put people in insane asylums that don't do a tenth of what you do. Here, take your lousy money and your damn whiskey and get out of here.'

She did not move. She sat there looking like someone tired of waiting for a train. She did not seem to hear him. But this mood was in such contrast to her vitality of a minute ago that there was no doubting that she had heard him, and no doubting that what he was saying had caused her mood to change.

'I'm sorry,' he said. 'I'm terribly sorry, Gloria. I'd rather cut my throat than say that. Do you believe me? You do believe me, don't you? You do believe I only said it because –'

'Because you believed it,' she said. 'No. Mrs Liggett is not a Lesbian, if you're interested. I went to their apartment with her husband and I slept with him. She's away. I stole the coat, because he tore my clothes. He practically raped me. Huh. You think that's

funny, but it's true. There are people who don't know as much about me as you do, you know. I'll go now.'

He got up and stood in front of the door.

'Please,' she said. 'Let's not have a struggle.'

'Sit down, Gloria. Please sit down.'

'It's no use, Eddie, I've made up my mind. I can't have you for a friend if you're going to throw things up at me that I told you in confidence. I've told you more than I've ever told anyone else, even my psychiatrist. But at least he has professional ethics. At least he wouldn't get angry and throw it all up to me. I trusted you as a friend, and -'

'You *can* trust me. Don't go. Besides, you can't go this way. Listen, sit down, darling.' He took her hand, and she allowed herself to be guided to a chair. 'I'll call up a girl I know, I was out with her last night, and ask her to bring some day clothes over here. She's about your build.'

'Who is she?'

'You wouldn't - her name is Norma Day. She goes to N.Y.U. She's very good-looking. I'll call her and she'll come right over. I have a sort of date with her anyway. All right?'

'Uh-huh.' Gloria was pleased and bright. 'I think I'll take a bath. Shall I? Okay?'

'Sure.'

'Okay,' she said. 'You sleep.'

*

Weston Liggett walked up the platform to where the line of parked cars began, and as he reached the beginning of the line he heard a horn blown six or seven times. A Ford station wagon was just arriving. It was driven by a young girl, and two other girls about the same age were on the front seat with her. Liggett took off his hat and waved.

'Hello, pretty girls,' he said. He stood beside the right front door. The girl in the driver's seat spoke to him:

'Daddy, this is Julie Rand; this is my father.'

'How do you do,' he said to the new girl, and then spoke to the girl in the middle: 'Hello, Frances.'

'Lomistligget,' said Frances.

'Where's Bar?' he said.

'She drove Mother over to the club. We're all going there for lunch. Get in, we're late.'

'No, we're not. Mother knew I was coming out on this train.'

'Well, we're late anyway,' said Ruth Liggett, the driver. 'We're always late. Like the late Jimmy Walker.'

'Oh, ho, ho.' Miss Rand laughing.

'Is that door closed, Daddy?' said Ruth.

'Think so. Yes,' he said.

'It rattles so. We ought to turn this in while we can still get something on it.'

'Uh-huh. We'll turn this in and sell the house. Would that suit you?' he said.

'Oh. Always talking about how broke we are. And in front of strangers.'

'Who's a stranger? Oh, Miss Rand. Well, she's not exactly a stranger, is she? Aren't you Henry Rand's daughter?'

'No. I'm his niece. My father was David Rand. I'm visiting my Uncle Henry and Aunt Bess, though.'

'Well, then you're not a stranger. You like this car, don't you?'

'Don't call it a car, Daddy,' said Ruth.

'I like it very much,' said Miss Rand. 'It's very nice, I think.'

'Ooh, what a prevaricator! She does not. She didn't want to ride in it. You should have seen her. When she came out of the house she took one look and said, "Is this what we're going in?" Didn't you? Own up.'

'Well, I never rode in a truck before.'

'A truck!' said Ruth.

'Aren't there station wagons where you come from?'

'No. We just have regular cars.'

'She comes from - what's the name of the place, Randy?'

'Wilkes-Barre, P.A.'

'And a very nice town it is,' said Liggett. 'I remember it very well. It's near Scranton. I have a lot of very dear friends in Scranton.'

'Do you know anybody in Wilkes-Barre?' said Miss Rand.

'I don't believe so - Ruth!'

'Well, he ought to stay on his own side of the road.'

'You can't count on that. I don't mind taking chances, but not when there are other people in the car.'

'Oh, he wouldn't have hit me.'

'That's what you think. No wonder this car's all shot.'

'Now you can't blame that on me, Daddy. I don't drive this car that much.'

'Well, I'll admit you're not responsible for this car, but the Chrysler, you are responsible for that. Clutch is slipping because you ride it all the time. Fenders wrinkled.'

'Who wrinkled it - not them. It. The left hind fender. That happened when someone else was driving, not me.'

'Well, let's not talk about it.'

'No, of course not. I'm right. That's why we won't talk about it.'

'Is that fair? Do I change the subject when I'm in the wrong, Ruth? Do I?'

'No, darling. That wasn't fair.' She reached her hand back to be held. He kissed it.

'Why, Daddy!' The others did not see.

'Shh,' he said and then was silent until they came to the club. 'Here we are. I'll go around and wash up. I'll meet you in three minutes.'

In the locker room he rang for the steward and arranged to cash two cheques. The club had a rule against cashing a cheque for more than twenty-five dollars on any single day, but he made them out as of two dates and the steward, who had done this many times before, gave him fifty dollars. The sixty dollars Liggett had left for Gloria and the other money he had spent on her had left him short, and he knew Emily would think it strange that he had spent so much in one night.

He had a highball, and as he prepared it and drank it he wondered what it was that made him feel so tender toward Emily, when he was sure that what he ought to be feeling was unwillingness to see her. Yet he wanted very much to see her. He wondered what had made him kiss Ruth's hand. He hadn't done that for a long time, and never had he done it quite so warmly and spontaneously. Always before this it had been a part of a game he played with Ruth in which Ruth played a flirtatious girl and he was a hick from the country. He joined the party in the grill.

He went straight to Emily and kissed her cheek.

'Oh-ho, somebody had a highball,' she said.

'Somebody needed a highball,' he said. 'Somebody has a hangover and badly needed a drink. How about the rest of you? Cocktail, dear?'

'Not I, thanks,' said Emily, 'and I don't think the girls had better have anything if they're going to play tennis. Let's order, shall we?'

'Steak,' said Ruth. 'How about you, Randy? Steak?'

'Yes, please.'

'We all want steak,' said Ruth. 'You do, don't you, Frannie?'

'I don't,' said Barbara, the younger Liggett girl. 'Not that it makes any difference to Miss Smarty Pants, but steak is exactly what I don't want. Julie, if you'd rather not have steak just say so. You too, Frannie. Mother, do you want steak?'

'No, dear, I think I'd rather have just a chop. Will that take too long, Harry?'

'Bout ten minutes, Mizz Liggett. Course you be having soup maybe, first, 'n' by the time yole get finished with your soup chop'll be ready.'

'Daddy, steak?' said Ruth.

'Right. Tomato juice cocktail first for me, if that's all right, Ruth?'

'Absolutely. Have we decided? Chops for how many? Mother, chops. Miss Barbara, chops. Randy, chops. Daddy, steak. Frannie, steak, and me, steak. Have you got that, Harry?'

'Yes, Miss Liggett. What about vege'ables?'

'Just bring in a lot of vegetables,' said Ruth.

All through the ordering Liggett watched Ruth and thought of Emily. Emily - and he did not remember this at the moment - who retained the mouth, nose, chin, bone structure, and, to some extent, the complexion Emily had had and that made her handsome; but she was handsome no longer. What Emily retained only made you ask what had happened that left her a plain woman with good features. The eyes, of course they made the difference. She looked nowadays like the eyes of someone who has many headaches, although this did not happen to be the case. Emily was apparently very healthy.

Now he watched her busying herself with her hands; ~~with~~ her napkin, touching without changing the position of the ~~the~~ ware, folding her hands. She had a way of wat ~~the~~

when she was using them. He wondered about that, noticing it for the first time. He could not recall ever having seen her watching her hands when they were resting and still, the way she would have if she were conscious of them in the sense of being vain. What she did was to watch them as though she were checking up on their efficiency, their neatness. It was just another part of the way she lived. Her life was like that.

Often she would sit at home with a book of poems in her hand and she would be looking in the direction of the window, a dreamy look in her eyes. He would look again and again at her, wondering what pretty thoughts had been started by what line in what poem. Then she would say suddenly something like: 'Do you think I ought to ask the Hobsons for Thursday night? You like her, don't you?' Liggett supposed a lot of husbands were like him; two or three, at least, of his own generation had confided to him that they didn't know their own wives. They had been married, some of them, as much as twenty years; reasonably if not strictly faithful, good providers, good fathers, hard workers, and temperate. Then after a year or so of the depression, when they saw it was not a little thing that was going to pass, these men began taking stock of what life had given them or they had taken. Usually men of this kind began counting with, 'I have a wife and two children . . .' and go on from there to their 'investments', cash, job, houses, cars, boats, horses, clothes, furniture, trust fund, pair of binoculars, club bonds, and so on. They were - these men - able to see right away that the tangible assets in the spring of 1931 were worth on the whole about a quarter of what they had cost originally, and in some cases less than that. And in some cases, nothing. By the time the depression had reached that point such men accepted as fact the fact that nothing that you could buy or sell was worth what it once had been worth. At least it worked out that way. Then a few men, a few million men, asked themselves whether the things they had bought ever had been worth what had been paid for them. Ah! That was worth thinking about, worth buying heavy and expensive books to find out about. Some of the keenest practical jokers on the floor of the Stock Exchange went home nights to see what the hell John Stuart Mill said - to find out who the hell John Stuart Mill was.

But among Liggett's friends there were men who, beginning

their inventories with, 'I have a wife and two children -' went through the list of their worldly goods and then came back to the first item: wife. Then they discovered that they could not really be sure they had their wives. The mortality rate for marriages in Liggett's class is fairly close to 100 per cent, but until the great depression there was no reason to find this out; most of these men believed that they were working for the happiness of their wives and children as well as for their own advancement, but an idle woman is an idle woman, whether her husband is downtown making millions or downtown trying to hold on to a \$40-a-week job. Men like Liggett - in 1930 you would see them on the roads of Long Island and Westchester, in cap and windbreaker and sports shoes, taking walks on Sunday with their wives, trying to get to know their wives, because they wanted to believe that a wife was one thing they could count on. Of course there was nothing deliberately insulting in this attitude, and as often as not the wife was not conscious of insult, so it was all right. She knew that he always had taken her to football games and the theatre, he paid her bills, he bought her Christmas presents, he was generous to her poor relations, he did not interfere with the education and rearing of the children. Sometimes she did not even ask why, when he became more curious, tried to become more companionable. She knew there was a depression, and she saw the magazine articles about the brave wives who were standing shoulder-to-shoulder with their husbands; she read the sermons in the Monday papers in which clergymen told their parishioners (and the press; always the press) that the depression was a good thing because it brought husbands and wives closer to each other.

Liggett was not quite one of these men; Emily certainly was not one of these women. For one thing, Liggett was a Pittsburgher and Emily a Bostonian. That was one thing, not two. Liggett was precisely the sort of person who, if he hadn't married Emily, would be just the perfect person for Emily to snub. All her life she seemed to be saving up for one snub, which would have to be delivered to an upper-class American, since no foreigner and no lower-class American could possibly understand what she had that she felt entitled her to deliver a snub. What she had was a Colonial governor; an unbroken string of studious Harvard men; their women. Immediately and her own was, of course, the Winsor-Mincent

Club Sewing Circle background. She had a few family connexions in New York, and they were unassailable socially; they never went out. It came as a surprise which he was a long time understanding for Liggett to learn, after he married Emily, that Emily never had stopped at a hotel in New York. She explained that the only possible reason you went to New York was to visit relations, and then you stopped with them, not at a hotel. Yes, that was true, he agreed - and never told her the fun he had had as a kid, stopping at New York hotels; the time he released a roll of toilet paper upon Fifth Avenue, the time he climbed along the ledge from one window to another. He was a little afraid of her.

But she was better off with him than she might have been with a Boston man. He was rich and handsome, a Yale athlete. Those qualifications were enough to explain his attraction for her. But he was more than that. She was handsome, she was healthy, and therefore she was passionate, and she wanted him from the moment she first met him. In the beginning Liggett himself was all mixed up about her; he was awed by her manner and her accent (he never got over the accent, and only got accustomed to the manner). She was less handsome than other girls he had known, but he had not known anyone like her, not so close. They met at a deb party, on one of her infrequent visits to New York - his last before beginning training for crew. He made a date with her for tea the following day, but had to break it, and thus began a correspondence which on his part was regulated by the necessity of staying in college and rowing at the same time, and on her part by a schedule: never answer more than one letter a week, and never until two days after the letter has been received. Because of her he decided to go to Harvard Business School. This pleased his father, who gave him a Fiat phaeton and anything else he asked for. There was one thing he could not ask his father for, and that was Emily's fair white body. Emily gave that without being asked, one winter's night in Boston. After waiting three miserable weeks to see if anything was going to happen, they decided to be engaged.

She was better off married to Liggett than she might have been with a Boston man because he never took her passion for granted. A Boston man might have, and might not be long looking around for more of the same from someone else. Liggett could not take her

for granted. There is something about those good, good words of sleeping together, the language of sleeping together, when spoken in the tones of Commonwealth Avenue, that no man who has been brought up west of the Connecticut River can fail to notice. And when a man is listening for the words, when he teaches them to a woman, when he asks her to say them, he does not take everything all at once. He will want more.

There was that, and there was the secrecy. Their intimate moments were their own, so much so that Liggett did not once mention Emily's pregnancy to anyone, not even to his own sister, while she was carrying their first child. It was nothing they agreed upon; Emily herself told Liggett's sister. But it was part of the way he felt about Emily. Anything that had to do with their intimate life was not to be discussed with a third person, so far as he was concerned.

To a degree this was true of everything else in their relationship. Liggett's impulse was always to talk about Emily, but he had gone that important step above vulgarity: he secretly recognized his own temptation to vulgarity. However valuable an asset this may be, it had one bad effect. A man ought to be able, when it becomes necessary, to discuss his wife with a third person, man or woman. Since it was impossible for him to bring himself to discuss Emily with another man he found himself in a spot where he had to talk to some woman. It had to be someone who knew Emily, someone close to her. He looked around and for the first time became aware that Emily in the years she had lived in New York - at that time, seven; it was in 1920 - had not made a single close friend. Her best friend was a Boston girl, Martha Harvay. Martha was a divorcee. She had been married to a young millionaire, who was practically illiterate, always drunk, was three inches shorter than she, and never had spoken an uncivil or impolite word to anyone in his life. Martha had grown up with Emily and they saw each other frequently, but when it came time to discuss Emily with her, Liggett saw how impossible it would be. Martha in a way was Emily over again.

The occasion, however, was urgent. Emily's family's money was mostly in cotton mills. Emily's father was a doctor, a pleasant, unimaginative man who studied medicine in a day when surgeons still spoke of 'laudable pus'. (He never quite got over the surprise

of learning that Walter Reed was right.) In fact his presence in medicine is explained by a fondness for the dissection of cats. It was the only cerebral activity he ever had been interested in, so his father and mother steered him into medicine. A merit-badge boy scout would have been as useful in an emergency as Emily's father, but a few friends went to him for colds and sore throat, and they constituted his practice. His practice was his excuse for neglecting his financial responsibilities, but every year or two he would have an idea, and at this time his idea was to get rid of all his cotton holdings and turn the cash into a vague something else. This time the vague something else was German marks. He just knew they were going to be worth something, and as he had travelled in Germany as a young man, he thought it would be pleasant, since his fortune would soon be doubled, to have a castle on the Rhine where even at that moment you could have a castle, they said fully staffed and equipped for \$100 a month.

Liggett did not care a very great deal what the old man did with his own money, but that money, he felt, was not altogether the old man's to fool with. The doctor had not earned it; he had inherited it, and since he had inherited it, it seemed to Liggett to be a kind of trust which the doctor had no right to violate. At least it was not to be squandered. If the doctor could go on year in, year out without assuming a permanent responsibility for the money then he ought not to be permitted to risk losing all of it when he had a foolish hunch. Cotton was high that year, and while it was debatable whether it was the height of shrewdness to dump so much stock on a favourable market, Liggett at least conceded that there was a chance the market would absorb the doctor's holdings without strong reaction. No, with the old gentleman's decision to sell Liggett could not seriously quarrel (indeed, it would have been more like the old man to sell at the bottom of the market). But German marks, for Christ's sake!

Liggett wished Emily had a brother, or even the kind of sister some people have. But Emily's sister was a total stranger, and brother she had none. Next was friend, and friend was Martha. He rejected the plan of talking to Martha the moment her name conjured up a picture of her. But the more he thought the more he was convinced that he had to talk to somebody about the situation. Emily and the two little girls were in Hyannisport that summer,

and he did not want to speak to Emily if he could help it. She was taking the children very seriously at the time and talk about her father would worry her.

Martha was just going out when he telephoned, going out to dine alone, and she was not surprised or curious at his calling her for dinner. She said yes. He asked her if she would like a drink, and she said she would, very much, and he said he would bring a bottle of gin. He stopped at a place in Lexington Avenue, bought a bottle of the six-dollar gin, had a drink on Matt, the proprietor, and took a taxi, one of those small, low Philadelphia-made un-American-looking Yellows of that period.

Martha lived on Murray Hill between Park and Madison, in an automatic-elevator apartment. They had orange blossom cocktails, which Liggett liked. She asked once, and only once, about Emily. She said: 'How's Emily? She's at Hyannisport, isn't she?' He said she was fine, and was on the verge of correcting himself to say that whether she knew it or not she was not fine at all. Then later, when he saw Martha did not come back to Emily, he was in more real danger of talking about Emily; a girl who had what Martha had, the assurance and poise that gave her courage to accept his wanting to have dinner because she was herself and not merely a trusted friend of his wife's - you could confide in that girl. But at the same time the thing he wanted to talk about began to recede. He began to enjoy himself because he was enjoying Martha's company.

They had two cocktails, and then she told him to take off his coat. Next he thought she would offer him a cigar, because take his coat off was exactly what he wanted to do. It was so comfortable here. 'Are you hungry?' he said.

'Not specially. Let's wait. It'll be cool around nine o'clock, if you're in no hurry.'

'Gosh, I'm not in a hurry.'

'Have some more cocktails, shall we? You know, I like to drink. I never knew I did - gosh, I never even knew about drinking - till I married Tommy, and he used to try to get me drunk, but that was no good. I don't like to have people try to get me drunk. If I want to get drunk I'll do it.'

He took the cocktail shaker to the kitchen and made very strong cocktails, not entirely on purpose, but not entirely accidentally, for

what she had just been saying reminded him of a physical, biological, whatever-you-want-to-call-it fact: that Martha had been married and therefore had slept with a man. It meant no more to him for the time being. It was just strange that he had somehow ceased to think of her as a girl with a life of her own. Almost always he had thought of her as someone who, when he knew her better, would become finally a good sport, a sexless friend of Emily's.

'Today is Bastille Day in Paris,' he said, when he returned with the cocktails. (It was also the day Sacco and Vanzetti were convicted.)

'So it is. I hope to be there next year on Bastille Day.'

'Oh, really?'

'I think so. I couldn't go to the Cape this summer because Tommy finds out where I am and comes calling at all hours.'

'Isn't there some way to put a stop to that?' he said.

'Oh, I suppose there is. People are always suggesting things like the police. But why do that? They don't seem to remember that I like Tommy.'

'Oh, do you?'

'Very much. I'm not in love with him, but I like him.'

'Oh, I didn't know that.'

'Well, of course you couldn't be expected to.'

'No, that's true. I guess this is the first time you and I've really talked together.'

'It is.' She had her arm across the back of the sofa. She put down her cigarette and crushed it in the tray and picked up her cocktail. She looked away from him as she raised the glass. 'As a matter of fact, I never thought we ever would be like this, the two of us, sitting, talking, having a cocktail together.'

'Why?'

'Do you want the truth?' she said.

'Of course.'

'Well, all right. The truth is I never liked you.'

'You didn't.'

'No,' she said. 'But I do now.'

Why? Why? Why? He wanted to ask. Why? Why do you like me now? I like you. How I like you! 'But you do now,' he repeated.

'Yes. Aren't you interested in knowing why I like you now after not liking you for such a long time?'

'Of course, but if you want to tell me you will and if you don't there's no use my asking.'

'Come here,' she said. He sat beside her on the sofa and took her hand. 'I like the way you smell.'

'Is that why you like me now and didn't before?'

'Damn before!' She put her hand on his cheek. 'Wait a minute,' she said. 'Don't get up. I'll do it.' She went to one of the two large windows and pulled down the shade. 'People across the street.'

He had her then and there. And from that moment on he never loved Emily again.

'Do you want to stay here tonight?' she said. 'If I'm going to be with child for this we might as well be together all night. If you want to stay?'

'I do, I do.'

'Grand. I'll have to phone the maid and tell her not to come in early tomorrow. You'll be out of here before ten, tomorrow I mean, won't you?'

They had a wildly passionate affair that summer. They would have dinner in little French restaurants, drinking bad whiskey out of small coffee cups. She was sailing in September and the night before she sailed she said to him: 'I don't care if I die now, do you?'

'No. Except I want to live.' All summer he had been doing arithmetic on scratch paper - financial arrangements for getting a divorce from Emily. 'Once again, marry me.'

'No, darling. We'd be no good married to each other. Me especially. But this I know, that for the rest of our lives, whenever we see each other, if I look into your eyes and you look into mine, and we see the thing that we see now - nothing can stop us, can it?'

'No. Nothing.'

The next time he saw her was two years later in Paris. In the meantime he had met and lain with ten other women, and Martha was in the White Russian taxi-driver phase. They didn't even have to give each other up, for there was scarcely recognition, let alone love, when again their eyes met.

It got around that he was in the town, but in some kind of

ever told Emily she never let it make any difference. He was comparatively discreet in that he avoided schemers. Among the women he slept with was an Englishwoman, right out of Burke's Peerage, who gave him gonorrhea, or stomach ulcers as it was then called. To Emily he confided that in addition to the ulcers he had a hernia, and she accepted that, not sure what a hernia was, but knowing that it was not a topic for dinner-table conversation. She was so incurious that he was able to keep at home the paraphernalia for the treatment of his disease.

Dr Winchester, by the way, did not buy the marks. An honest broker dissuaded him.

*

Liggett addressed his wife: 'Are you coming to town tonight or in the morning?'

'Not till Tuesday morning. The girls have a day off tomorrow.'

'Why?'

'One of the kids got diphtheria and they're fumigating the school,' said Ruth. 'Are you staying out?'

'I'd like to. I'd like to really get going on the boat. But I've got to go back to town tonight, so what about you and Bar and Frankie and Miss Rand all getting paint brushes and going to work tomorrow?'

'Pardon me while I die from laughing,' said Ruth.

'I will if the others do,' said Barbara.

'You're safe and you know it,' said Ruth.

'Girls?' said Emily.

*

'Let's save the Plaza?' said Isabel Stannard.

'Nope. I'm for blowing it up,' said Jimmy.

'What?'

'Let it go, dear. It wasn't worth it.'

'What wasn't worth what?' she said.

'Please, will you go back to whatever it was you said first? Let's save the Plaza. All right, let's save it. Save it for what? Do you want to go some place else?'

'I think we ought to go there some time when we're feeling more like it.'

'Well, I don't exactly see what you mean. I feel like it. I felt like it before I saw you, I felt like it up at your apartment, and you did too -'

'No, not exactly. Remember I was dressed for the country. I thought we were going for a drive.'

'Mm. Well, where to, then?' he said.

'Let's keep walking down Fifth -'

'Till we get to Childs Forty-eighth Street.'

'All right,' she said. 'That's all right with me.'

'I thought it would be.'

'We could go to Twenty-One.'

'It's Sunday.'

'Aren't they open Sunday? I'm sure I've been there Sunday some time.'

'Oh, I know you have, some time. But not at this hour. It's too early, dear. It's too early. They don't open till around five-thirty.'

'Are you sure that isn't something new?'

'When the same people were at 42 West Forty-ninth they had the same rule about Sunday. Now that they're at 21 West Fifty-second Street, damned if they haven't the same rule they had at 42 West Forty-ninth. The same people, the same rule, different places.'

'Another one of those hats,' she said.

'Another one of what hats?'

'Didn't you see it? I think they're rather cute, but I don't know whether to buy one or not. Those hats. Didn't you notice that girl that went by with the foreign-looking man? She was smoking a cigarette.'

'She gets paid for that.'

'Paid for it?'

'Yes, paid for it. I read that in Winchell's column -'

'The way you wander about from subject to subject, you're like a mountain goat jumping from crag to crag -'

'From precipice to precipice, and back -'

'I know that one, don't say it. Why does she get paid?'

'Why does who get paid, my lamb, my pet?'

'The woman. The one with the hat. The one I just mentioned on. You said Walter Winchell said she gets money.'

'Oh, yes. She gets paid for smoking a cigarette on Fifth Avenue. Winchell ran that in his column after the Easter parade. They're trying to popularize street smoking for women -'

'It'll never go.'

'It'll never take the place of the old Welsbach burner, if - hello. Hello.' He spoke to two people, girl and man.

'Who are they? See, she has one of those Eugenic hats. She's rather attractive. Who is she?'

'She's a model at Bergdorf Goodman's.'

'She's French?'

'She's about as French as you are -'

'That's more French than you think.'

'Well, than I am. She's - are you still interested? - a Jewess, and he's a lawyer, a Broadway divorce lawyer. He's the kind you see in the tabloids every Monday morning. He tips off the city editors of the *News* and *Mirror* and gets a free ad on page three. The story's always about his client, of course, but he gets his name printed in the third paragraph, with his address. Winthrop S. Saltonstall, of Fourteen-Something Broadway.'

'Huh. Winthrop Saltonstall's hardly a Jewish name.'

'That's what *you* think.'

'Then I suppose she's getting a divorce - although of course she may just know him anyway.'

'That's right. You're catching on.'

'I've always wanted to go to a service at St Patrick's. Will you take me some time?'

'What do you mean, a service? Do you mean Mass?'

'Yes, I guess so.'

'All right, I'll take you some time. We'll get married in St Pat's'.

'Is that a threat or a promise?'

He stopped dead. 'Listen, Isabel, will you do me a favour? A big favour?'

'Why, I don't know. What is it?'

'Will you just go on being a Bryn Mawr girl, nice, attractive, worried about what Leuba taught you, polite, well-bred -'

'Yes, yes, and what?'

'And leave the vulgarities of the vernacular to me? When you want to be slangy, when you want to make a wisecrack, stifle the impulse.'

'But I didn't make any wisecrack.'

'Oh-ho-ho, you're telling me.'

'But I still don't see what you mean, Jimmy.'

'They ought to take those fences down and let the people see what they're doing. I am an old construction-watcher, and I think I will take it up with Ivy Lee.'

'What are you talking about?'

'I was just thinking as we passed where they're building Radio City, if they took the fences away I'd be able to check up on the progress and report back to the Rockefellers. Ivy Lee is their public relations counsel.'

'Ivy Lee. It sounds like a girl's name.'

'You ought to hear the whole name.'

'What is it?'

'Ivy Ledbetter Lee. He gets \$250,000 a year. Here we are, and we probably won't be able to get a table.'

They got a table. They knew exactly what they wanted, including all the coffee you could drink for the price of one cup. On the dinner you could even have all the food you wanted for the prix fixe.

'What are we up to this afternoon?'

'Oh, whatever you like,' she said.

'I want to see "The Public Enemy".'

'Oh, divine. James Cagney.'

'Oh, you like Cagney?'

'Adore him.'

'Why?' he said.

'Oh, he's so attractive. So tough. Why - I just thought of something.'

'What?'

'He's - I hope you don't mind this - but he's a little like you.'

'Uh. Well, I'll phone and see what time the main picture goes on.'

'Why?'

'Well, I've seen it and you haven't, and I don't want you to see the ending first.'

'Oh, I don't mind.'

'I'll remind you of that after you've seen the picture. I'll go

downstairs and phone. If King Prajadhipok comes in and tries to pick you up it won't be a compliment, so have him put out.'

'Oh, on account of his eyes. See, I got it.'

*

'Will you try that number again, please?' said the old man. He held the telephone in a way that was a protest against the handset type of phone, a routine protest against something new. He held it with two hands, the one hand where it should be, the other hand cupped under the part he spoke into. 'It's Stuyvesant, operator. Are you dialling S, T, U? . . . Well, I thought perhaps you were dialling S, T, Y.'

He waited, but after more than five minutes he gave up again.

Joab Ellery Reddington, A.B. (Wesleyan), M.A. (Harvard), PH.D. (Wesleyan), had come to New York for a special purpose, but the success of his mission depended upon his first completing the telephone call. Without making that connexion the trip was futile. Well enough, too well, he knew the address, and the too many taxicabs, the bus systems, the subway and elevated, the street car lines all helped to annihilate space and time for anyone who wanted to present himself in person at the door of the home of Gloria Wandrous. But one of the last things in the world Dr Reddington wanted to do was to be found in the neighbourhood of the home of Gloria Wandrous. The very last thing he wanted to do was to be seen with her, and it went back from there to the other extreme: the thing he wanted most, eventually, was to be so far removed from the company of Gloria Wandrous, from any association with her, that, as he once heard a Mist' Bones say to a Mist' Interlocutor, it would cost twenty dollars to send her a postcard. No, he definitely did not want to go near her home. But he did want to get in touch with her, just this one more time. He wanted to talk with her, he wanted to reason with her, make a deal with her. Failing in making a deal with her, he - he was not prepared to say, even to himself.

But no one answered the telephone. What was the matter with her mother, her uncle? It was no surprise to Dr Reddington to learn that Gloria was not at home. She was seldom home. But he often had called at her home and been given a number to call. Full

well he knew that whether her mother and uncle knew it or not the number they gave was a speakeasy or a bachelor's apartment; a Harlem beer flat was one number Dr Reddington had called on occasion (he hated to think of that now, the way those Negroes were not surprised or shocked by the appearance of his kind of man, Phi Beta Kappa key and severely conservative clothes and all, at a beer flat one Saturday noon, calling for a drunken girl who greeted him on terms that too plainly indicated that he was not a stern parent coming to fetch a recalcitrant daughter, but - just what he was).

Dr Reddington sat on the edge of the bed and (as he expressed it to himself) cursed himself for a blithering idiot for never having written down the numbers he had called. No, that was being unjust to himself. The reason he had not written down those numbers was a good one; he didn't want to be found dead with those numbers on him. He sat on the bed and his fingers searched the soft, faintly damp, white skin of his jowls for a hair that had escaped his razor that morning. There was none. There never was. Only when the barber shaved him. He sat in an attitude that is classically pensive, but he could not think. God, wasn't there one name that would come to him? One name in the numbers that he had called?

It was useless to try to think of the names of speakeasies. His personal experience with speakeasies was slight, as he never drank; but he knew from going to them with Gloria that a place would be known familiarly as Jack's or Giuseppe's - and then when the proprietor gave you a card to the place (which you threw away the moment you were safe outside), it would be called Club Aristocrat or something of the sort. So it was no use trying to think of the names of the places, and too much trouble, practically a life work, to try to find them from memory. No telling what a taxi driver would think if you told him to drive up and down all the streets from Sheridan Square to Fourteenth Street in the hope of recognizing a basement entrance through which you had passed one night long ago. No, the thing to do was to recall a name, a person's name, the name of someone Gloria knew.

A, Ab, Ab, Ab, ante, con, de - no, this was no time to be thinking of the Latin prepositions. Thinking of things like that would only rattle him now. Think viciously, that was the thing. A for

Abbott. A for Abercrombie. A for Abingdon. A for Abrams. Wonder what ever happened to that Abrams girl that was so good on the piano? He could think kindly of her now and remember her as a girl who had a nice touch at the piano. She was a degenerate at heart, though, and when her father came to him and asked him what was the meaning of this what his daughter had told him, Dr Reddington had almost felt like telling the girl's father what kind of child he was raising. But instead he had said: 'Look here, Abrams, this is a terrible thing you are saying to me, a serious charge. Am I to infer that you are taking an impressionable child's word against mine?' And the little man had said he was only asking, only wanted to know the truth so if it was the truth he could go farther. 'Oh, indeed? Go farther, eh? And who might I ask would take your word against mine? I was born in this town, you know, and for five generations my ancestors have been prominent in this town. I myself have spent twenty-two years in the teaching profession, and you have been here how long? Two years? Well, six years. What's six years against hundreds? Do you think even your own people would take your word against mine? Dr Stein, for instance. Do you think he would believe you rather than me? Mr Pollack at The Bee. Do you think he would believe you, risk his standing in this community where there are mighty few of your people, to side with you in an attack on me with a story that has no foundation in fact? Mr Abrams, I could thrash you within an inch of your life for coming to me with this accusation. The only thing that prevents me from doing that is that I am a father myself. I think we've said enough about this. Your daughter is your problem. My job is to see that she is given an education, but my job begins at nine in the morning and ends at three in the afternoon.' The Abramses. They probably were in New York, at least they took their daughter out of school and sold out their store shortly after the two fathers had their conversations. Abrams. A lot of Abramses in New York.

B. C. D. E. F. G. H. Think of all the people in this city, the money the telephone company must make. All those people, all with their problems. B. Buckley. Brown, Brown with an e on the end. Barnes. Barnard. Brace. Butterfield. Brunner! Gloria knew someone named Brunner. Dr Reddington found the number and gave it to the operator.

He heard the signal of the number being rung, and then the practised voice: 'What number did you call, please? . . . I'm sorry, sir, that telephone has been dis-con-nec-ted.'

He replaced the transmitter. This was a hunch. He looked up the address and memorized it, and went downstairs and took a taxi to the address. He told the driver to wait at the corner of Hudson Street and the driver gave him a good look and said he would.

Dr Reddington walked down the street, following a girl with a large package under her arm. Any other time she might have interested him, but not today. She was just the back of a girl with a good figure, from what he could see, carrying a bundle. Then to his dismay she turned in at the number he sought, and he had to walk on without stopping; and he thought of the taxi driver, who would be looking at him and wondering why he had passed the number. All confused he turned around and went back to the taxi and they left the neighbourhood and drove back to the hotel in the sunshine.

*

'This is terribly nice of you,' said Gloria.

'Oh, that's all right,' said Miss Day.

'Teanks a lot, Norma,' said Eddie Brunner.

'Oh, I don't mind a bit. I know how it is,' said Miss Day. 'You'd roast in that mink coat today.'

'Eddie, you look out the window a minute,' said Gloria.

'Oh! You really did need these,' said Miss Day when Gloria took off her coat. 'I'm glad I had them. Usually on Sunday my extra things are at the cleaners'. I didn't think to bring a slip.'

'I won't need one with this skirt. This is a marvellous suit. Where did you get it?'

'Russek's. Were you playing strip poker?'

'It looks that way, doesn't it? Yes, I was, in a way. That is, we were shooting crap and I was 'way ahead at one time and then my luck changed, and when I offered to bet my dress the men took me up and of course I didn't think they'd hold me to it and it wasn't the men that held me to it, it was the girls on the party. Fine friends I have. It made me very angry and I left.'

'Are you going to school in New York?'

'No, I live here, but I couldn't go home looking like this. My family - they won't even allow me to smoke. All right, Eddie.'

'Looks better on you than it does on me,' said Norma.

'I wouldn't say that,' said Eddie.

'I wouldn't either,' said Gloria, 'but Eddie never says anything to make me get conceited. We've known each other such a long time.'

'Eddie, I thought you went on the wagon after Friday,' said Norma.

'I did.'

'Oh, that. That's mine,' said Gloria. 'I bought it for Eddie because I wanted to get in his good graces. You see I thought I was going to have to spend the day here and I was going to bribe Eddie to go uptown to one of the Broadway shops, I think there are some open on Sunday night, they always seem to be open. But then he suggested you, and I think you're perfectly darling to do this. I'll hang this up in one of your closets, Eddie, and call for it tomorrow. I've been intending to put it in storage but I keep putting it off and putting it off -'

'I know,' said Miss Day.

'- and then last night I was glad I hadn't, because a cousin of mine that goes to Yale, he and a friend arrived in an open car and it was cold. No top. They were frozen, but they insisted on driving out to a house party near Princeton.'

'Oh. Weren't your family worried? You didn't go home then?'

'The car broke down on the way back at some ungodly hour this morning. Bob, my cousin's friend, took us to a party when we got back to town and that's where I got in the crap game.'

'But what about your cousin? I should think -'

'Passed out cold, and he's not much help anyway. Not that he'd let them make me give up my dress, but he can't drink. None of our family can. I had two drinks of that Scotch and I'm reeling. I suppose you noticed it.'

'Oh, no. But I can never tell with other people till they start doing perfectly terrible things,' said Miss Day.

'Well, I feel grand. I feel like giving a party. By the way, before I forget it, if you give me your address I'll have these things cleaned and send them to you.'

'All right,' said Miss Day, and gave her address.

of course I'll ask him... Yes... 8135? I'm afraid I haven't quite got it. Oh... 8935... 39... Oh, 5135... Yes, I'll ask him to ring you... after six.... Oh, pardon, before six.... Thank you so much."

She replaced the receiver, scribbled 5319 on the blotting-pad and turned a mildly inquiring but uninterested gaze on Poirot.

Poirot began briskly.

"I observe that there is a house to be sold just on the outskirts of this town. Littlegreen House, I think is the name."

"Pardon?"

"A house to be let or sold," said Poirot slowly and distinctly. "Littlegreen House."

"Oh, Littlegreen House," said the young woman vaguely. "Littlegreen House, did you say?"

"That is what I said."

"Littlegreen House," said the young woman, making a tremendous mental effort. "Oh, well, I expect Mr. Gabler would know about that."

"Can I see Mr. Gabler?"

"He's out," said the young woman with a kind of faint, anaemic satisfaction as of one who says, "A point to me."

"Do you know when he will be in?"

"I couldn't say, I'm sure," said the young woman.

"You comprehend, I am looking for a house in this neighbourhood," said Poirot.

"Oh, yes," said the young woman, uninterested.

"And Littlegreen House seems to me just what I am looking for. Can you give me particulars?"

"Particulars?" The young woman seemed ~~startled~~

"Particulars of Littlegreen House."

Unwillingly she opened a drawer and took out a ~~very~~ file of papers. Then she called "John."

A lanky youth sitting in a corner looked up.

"Yes, miss."

"Have we got any particulars of—what did you say?"

"Littlegreen House," said Poirot distinctly.

"You've got a large bill of it here," I ~~remembered~~ pointing to the wall.

She looked at me coldly. Two to one, she seemed to think, was an unfair way of playing the game. She called up her own reinforcements.

"You don't know anything about Littlegreen House, do you, John?"

"No, miss. Should be in the file."

"I'm sorry," said the young woman without looking so in the least. "I rather fancy we must have sent all the particulars out."

"*C'est dommage.*"

"Pardon?"

"A pity."

"We've a nice bungalow at Hemel End, two bed, one sit." She spoke without enthusiasm, but with the air of one willing to do her duty by her employer.

"I thank you, no."

"And a semi-detached with small conservatory. I could give you particulars of that."

"No, thank you. I desired to know what rent you were asking for Littlegreen House."

"It's not to be rented," said the young woman, abandoning her position of complete ignorance of anything to do with Littlegreen House in the pleasure of scoring a point. "Only to be sold outright."

"The board says, 'To be Let or Sold.'"

"I couldn't say as to that, but it's for sale only."

At this stage in the battle the door opened and a grey-haired, middle-aged man entered with a rush. His eye, a militant one, swept over us with a gleam. His eyebrows asked a question of his employee.

"This is Mr. Gabler," said the young woman.

Mr. Gabler opened the door of an inner sanctum with a flourish.

"Step in here, gentlemen." He ushered us in, an ample gesture swept us into chairs and he himself was facing us across a flat-topped desk.

"And now what can I do for you?"

Poirot began again perseveringly.

"I desired a few particulars of Littlegreen House—"

He got no further. Mr. Gabler took command.

"Ah! Littlegreen House—there's a property! An absolute bargain. Only just come into the market. I can tell you, gentlemen, we don't often get a house of this class going at the price. Taste's swinging round. People are fed up with jerry-building. They want sound stuff. Good, honest building. A beautiful property—character—feeling—Georgian throughout. That's what people want nowadays—there's a feeling for period houses, you understand what I mean. Ah, yes, Littlegreen House won't belong in the market. It'll be snapped up. Snapped up! A member of Parliament came to look at it only last Saturday. Liked it so much he's coming down again this week-end. And there's a stock exchange gentleman after it, too. People want quiet nowadays when they come to the country, want to be well away from main roads. That's all very well for some people but we attract class here. And that's what that house has got. Class! You've got to admit, they knew how to build for gentlemen in those days. Yes, we shan't have Littlegreen long on our books."

Mr. Gabler, who, it occurred to me, lived up to his name very happily, paused for breath.

"Has it changed hands often in the last few years?" inquired Poirot.

"On the contrary. Been in one family over fifty years. Name of Arundell. Very much respected in the town. Ladies of the old school." He shot up, opened the door and called: "Particulars of Littlegreen House, Miss Jenkins. Quickly now." He returned to the desk.

"I require a house about this distance from London," said Poirot. "In the country, but not in the dead country, if you understand me—"

"Perfectly—perfectly. Too much in the country doesn't do. Servants don't like it for one thing. Here, you have the advantages of the country but not the disadvantages." Miss Jenkins flitted in with a typewritten sheet of paper which she placed in front of her employer, who dismissed her with a nod.

"Here we are," said Mr. Gabler, reading with practised rapidity. "Period house of character: four recep.,

eight bed and dressing, usual offices, commodious kitchen premises, ample outbuildings, stables, etc. Main water, old-world gardens, inexpensive upkeep, amounting in all to three acres, two summer-houses, etc., etc. Price £2,850 or near offer."

"You can give me an order to view?"

"Certainly, my dear sir." Mr. Gabler began writing in a flourishing fashion. "Your name and address?"

Slightly to my surprise, Poirot gave his name as Mr. Parotti.

"We have one or two other properties on our books which might interest you," Mr. Gabler went on.

Poirot allowed him to add two further additions.

"Littlegreen House can be viewed any time?" he inquired.

"Certainly, my dear sir. There are servants in residence. I might perhaps ring up to make certain. You will be going there immediately? Or after lunch?"

"Perhaps after lunch would be better."

"Certainly—certainly. I'll ring up and tell them to expect you about two o'clock—eh? Is that right?"

"Thank you. Did you say the owner of the house—a Miss Arundell, I think you said?"

"Lawson. Miss Lawson. That is the name of the present owner. Miss Arundell, I am sorry to say, died a short time ago. That is how the place has come into the market. And I can assure you it will be snapped up. Not a doubt of it. Between you and me, just in confidence, if you do think of making an offer I should make it quickly. As I've told you, there are two gentlemen after it already, and I shouldn't be surprised to get an offer for it any day from one or other of them. Each of them knows the other's after it, you see. And there's no doubt that competition spurs a man on. Ha, ha! I shouldn't like you to be disappointed."

"Miss Lawson is anxious to sell, I gather."

Mr. Gabler lowered his voice confidentially.

"That's just it. The place is larger than she wants—one middle-aged lady living by herself. She wants to get rid of this and take a house in London. Quite under-

standable. That's why the place is going so ridiculously cheap."

"She would be open, perhaps, to an offer?"

"That's the idea, sir. Make an offer and set the ball rolling. But you can take it from me that there will be no difficulty in getting a price very near the figure named. Why, it's ridiculous! To build a house like that nowadays would cost every penny of six thousand, let alone the land value and valuable frontages."

"Miss Arundell died very suddenly, didn't she?"

"Oh, I wouldn't say that. Anno domini—anno domini. She had passed her three-score years and ten some time ago. And she'd been ailing for a long time. The last of her family—you know something about the family, perhaps?"

"I know some people of the same name who have relations in this part of the world. I fancy it must be the same family."

"Very likely. Four sisters there were. One married fairly late in life and the other three lived on here. Ladies of the old school. Miss Emily was the last of them. Very highly thought of in the town."

He leant forward and handed Poirot the order.

"You'll drop in again and let me know what you think of it, eh? Of course, it may need a little modernising here and there. That's only to be expected. But I always say, 'What's a bathroom or two?' That's easily done."

We took our leave and the last thing we heard was the vacant voice of Miss Jenkins saying:

"Mrs. Samuels rang up, sir. She'd like you to ring her—Holland 5391."

As far as I could remember ~~there was nothing to remember~~ Miss Jenkins had scribbled on her pad and the matter finally arrived at through the telephone.

I felt convinced that Miss Jenkins was looking for revenge for having been forced to find the price of Littlegreen House.

CHAPTER VII

Lunch at The George

As we emerged into the market square, I remarked that Mr. Gabler lived up to his name! Poirot assented with a smile.

"He'll be rather disappointed when you don't return," I said. "I think he feels he has as good as sold you that house already."

"Indeed, yes, I fear there is a deception in store for him."

"I suppose we might as well have lunch here before returning to London, or shall we lunch at some more likely spot on our way back?"

"My dear Hastings, I am not proposing to leave Market Basing so quickly. We have not yet accomplished that which we came to do."

I stared.

"Do you mean—but, my dear fellow, that's all a wash-out. The old lady is dead."

"Exactly."

The tone of that one word made me stare at him harder than ever. It was evident that he had some bee in his bonnet over this incoherent letter.

"But if she's dead, Poirot," I said gently, "what's the use? She can't tell you anything now. Whatever the trouble was, it's over and finished with."

"How lightly and easily you put the matter aside! Let me tell you that *no* matter is finished with until Hercule Poirot ceases to concern himself with it!"

I should have known from experience that to argue with Poirot is quite useless. Unwarily I proceeded:

"But since she is dead—"

"Exactly, Hastings. Exactly—exactly—exactly.... You keep repeating the significant point with a magnificently obtuse disregard of its significance. Do you not see the importance of the point? Miss Arundell is *dead*."

"But, my dear Poirot, her death was perfectly natural

modernized in any way. The gardens are a picture. Very fond of her garden Miss Arundell was."

"It belongs, I see, to a Miss Lawson."

"That's right, sir. Miss Lawson, she was Miss Arundell's companion, and when the old lady died everything was left to her—house and all."

"Indeed? I suppose she had no relations to whom to leave it."

"Well, it was not quite like that, sir. She *had* nieces and nephews living. But, of course, Miss Lawson was with her all the time. And, of course, she was an old lady and—well—that's how it was."

"In any case I suppose there was just the house and not much money?"

I have often had occasion to notice how, where a direct question would fail to elicit a response, a false assumption brings instant information in the form of a contradiction.

"Very far from that, sir. Very far indeed. Every one was surprised at the amount the old lady left. The will was in the paper and the amount and everything. It seems she hadn't lived up to her income for many a long year. Something like three or four hundred thousand pounds she left."

"You astonish me," cried Poirot. "It is like a fairy tale—eh? The poor companion suddenly becomes unbelievably wealthy. Is she still young, this Miss Lawson? Can she enjoy her new-found wealth?"

"Oh, no, sir, she's a middle-aged person, sir."

His enunciation of the word "person" was quite an artistic performance. It was clear that Miss Lawson, ex-companion, had cut no kind of a figure in Market Basing.

"It must have been disappointing for the nephews and nieces," mused Poirot.

"Yes, sir, I believe it came as somewhat of a shock to them. Very unexpected. There's been feeling over it here in Market Basing. There are those who hold it isn't right to leave things away from your own flesh and blood. But, of course, there's others as hold that

"Thank you, sir. Thank you very much, sir. I'm sure I hope you'll settle here, sir."

"I hope so, too," said Poirot mendaciously.

We set forth from The George.

"Satisfied yet, Poirot?" I asked as we emerged into the street.

"Not in the least, my friend."

He turned in an unexpected direction.

"Where are you off to now, Poirot?"

"The church, my friend. It may be interesting. Some brasses—an old monument."

I shook my head doubtfully.

Poirot's scrutiny of the interior of the church was brief. Though an attractive specimen of what the guide-book calls Early Perp., it had been so conscientiously restored in Victorian vandal days that little of interest remained.

Poirot next wandered seemingly aimlessly about the churchyard reading some of the epitaphs, commenting on the number of deaths in certain families, occasionally exclaiming over the quaintness of a name.

I was not surprised, however, when he finally halted before what I was pretty sure had been his objective from the beginning.

An imposing marble slab bore a partly effaced inscription :

SACRED
TO THE MEMORY OF
JOHN LAVERTON ARUNDELL
GENERAL 24TH SIKHS
WHO FELL ASLEEP IN CHRIST MAY 19, 1888
AGED 69
"FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT WITH ALL THY MIGHT"

ALSO OF
MATILDA ANN ARUNDELL
DIED MARCH 10, 1912
"I WILL ARISE AND GO UNTO MY FATHER"

ALSO OF
AGNES GEORGINA MARY ARUNDELL
DIED NOVEMBER 20, 1921
"ASK AND YE SHALL RECEIVE"

Then came a brand-new piece of lettering, evidently
just done :

ALSO OF
EMILY HARRIET LAVERTON ARUNDELL
DIED MAY 1, 1936
"THY WILL BE DONE"

Poirot stood looking for some time.
He murmured softly :
"May 1st.... May 1st.... And to-day, June 28th,
I receive her letter. You see, do you not, Hastings,
that that fact has got to be explained?"
I saw that it had.
That is to say, I saw that Poirot was determined ~~that~~
it should be explained.

CHAPTER VIII

Interior of Littlegreen House

On leaving the churchyard, Poirot led the way ~~back~~
in the direction of Littlegreen House. I ~~noticed~~
his rôle was still that of the prospective ~~investor~~. ~~Com~~
fully holding the various ~~orders to view~~ in his hand ~~while~~
the Littlegreen House one ~~moment~~, he ~~passed~~ ~~open~~
the gate and walked up the ~~path~~ to the front door.
On this occasion our friend the ~~tenor~~ was not to be
seen, but the sound of ~~batting~~ could be heard ~~inside~~
the house, though at some distance ~~passed~~ in the
kitchen quarters.

Presently we heard footstep ~~coming~~ the ~~door~~ and the
door was opened by a ~~pleasant-looking~~ ~~man~~ of ~~average~~

fifty and sixty, clearly the old-fashioned type of servant seldom seen nowadays.

Poirot presented his credentials.

"Yes, sir, the house-agent telephoned. Will you step this way, sir?"

The shutters which I had noticed were closed on our first visit to spy out the land, were now all thrown open in preparation for our visit. Everything, I observed, was spotlessly clean and well kept. Clearly our guide was a thoroughly conscientious woman.

"This is the morning-room, sir."

I glanced round approvingly. A pleasant room with its long windows giving on the street. It was furnished with good, solid, old-fashioned furniture, mostly Victorian, but there was a Chippendale bookcase and a set of attractive Hepplewhite chairs.

Poirot and I behaved in the customary fashion of people being shown over houses. We stood stock still, looking a little ill at ease, murmuring remarks such as: "Very nice." "A very pleasant room." "The morning-room, you say?"

The maid conducted us across the hall and into the corresponding room on the other side. This was much larger.

"The dining-room, sir."

This room was definitely Victorian. A heavy mahogany dining-table, a massive sideboard of almost purplish mahogany with great clusters of carved fruit, solid leather, covered dining-room chairs. On the wall hung what were obviously family portraits.

The terrier had continued to bark in some sequestered spot. Now the sound suddenly increased in volume. With a crescendo of barking he could be heard galloping across the hall.

"Who's come into the house? I'll tear him limb from limb," was clearly the "burden of his song."

He arrived in the doorway, sniffing violently.

"Oh, Bob, you naughty dog," exclaimed our conductress. "Don't mind him, sir. He won't do you no harm."

Bob, indeed, having discovered the intruders, com-

pletely changed his manner. He fussed in and introduced himself to us in an agreeable manner.

"Pleased to meet you, I'm sure," he observed as he sniffed round our ankles. "Excuse the noise, won't you, but I have my job to do. Got to be careful who we let in, you know. But it's a dull life and I'm really quite pleased to see a visitor. Dogs of your own, I fancy?"

This last was addressed to me and I stooped and patted him.

"Nice little fellow," I said to the woman. "Needs plucking a bit, though."

"Yes, sir, he's usually plucked three times a year."

"Is he an old dog?"

"Oh, no, sir. Bob's not more than six. And sometimes he behaves just like a puppy. Gets hold of cook's slippers and prances about with them. And he's very gentle, though you wouldn't believe it to hear the noise he makes sometimes. The only person he goes for is the postman. Downright scared of him, the postman is."

Bob was now investigating the legs of Poirot's trousers. Having learned all he could, he gave vent to a prolonged sniff ("H'm, not too bad, but not really a doggy person") and returned to me, cocking his head on one side and looking at me expectantly.

"I don't know why dogs always go for postmen, I'm sure," continued our guide.

"It's a matter of reasoning," said Poirot. "The dog, he argues from reason. He is intelligent; he makes his deductions according to his point of view. There are people who may enter a house and there are people who may not—that a dog soon learns. *Eh bien*, who is the person who most persistently tries to gain admission, rattling on the door twice or three times a day—and who is never by any chance admitted? The postman. Clearly, then, an undesirable guest from the point of view of the master of the house. He is always sent about his business, but he persistently returns and tries again. Then a dog's duty is clear, to aid in driving this undesirable man away, and to bite him if possible. A most reasonable proceeding."

He beamed on Bob.

"And a most intelligent person, I fancy."

"Oh, he is, sir. He's almost human, Bob is."

She flung open another door.

"The drawing-room, sir."

The drawing-room conjured up memories of the past. A faint fragrance of pot-pourri hung about it. The chintzes were worn, their pattern faded garlands of roses. On the walls were prints and water-colour drawings. There was a good deal of china—fragile shepherds and shepherdesses. There were cushions worked in crewel stitch. There were faded photographs in handsome silver frames. There were many inlaid workboxes and tea caddies. Most fascinating of all to me were two exquisitely cut tissue-paper ladies under glass stands. One with a spinning-wheel, one with a cat on her knee.

The atmosphere of a bygone day, a day of leisure, of refinement, of "ladies and gentlemen," closed round me. This was indeed a "withdrawing-room." Here ladies sat and did their fancy-work, and if a cigarette was ever smoked by a favoured member of the male sex, what a shaking out of curtains and general airing of the room there would be afterwards!

My attention was drawn by Bob. He was sitting in an attitude of rapt attention close beside an elegant little table with two drawers in it.

As he saw that I was noticing him, he gave a short, plaintive yelp, looking from me to the table.

"What does he want?" I asked.

Our interest in Bob was clearly pleasing to the maid who obviously was very fond of him.

"It's his ball, sir. It was always kept in that drawer. That's why he sits there and asks."

Her voice changed. She addressed Bob in a high falsetto. "It isn't there any longer, beautiful. Bob's ball is in the kitchen. In the kitchen, Bobsie."

Bob shifted his gaze impatiently to Poirot.

"This woman's a fool," he seemed to be saying. "You look a brainy sort of chap. Balls are kept in certain places—this drawer is one of those places. There always

has been a ball here. Therefore there should be a ball there now. That's obvious dog-logic, isn't it?"

"It's not there now, boy," I said.

He looked at me doubtfully. Then as we went out of the room he followed slowly in an unconvinced manner.

We were shown various cupboards, a downstairs cloak-room, and a small pantry place, "where the mistress used to do the flowers, sir."

"You were with your mistress a long time?" asked Poirot.

"Twenty-two years, sir."

"You are alone here caretaking?"

"Me and cook, sir."

"She was also a long time with Miss Arundell?"

"Four years, sir. The old cook died."

"Supposing I were to buy the house, would you be prepared to stay on?"

She blushed a little.

"It's very kind of you, sir, I'm sure, but I'm going to retire from service. The mistress left me a nice little sum, you see, and I'm going to my brother. I'm only remaining here as a convenience to Miss Lawson until the place is sold—to look after everything."

Poirot nodded.

In the momentary silence a new sound was heard.

"Bump, bump, BUMP."

A monotonous sound increasing in volume and seeming to descend from above.

"It's Bob, sir." She was smiling. "He's got hold of his ball and he's bumping it down the stairs. It's a little game of his."

As we reached the bottom of the stairs a black rubber ball arrived with a thud on the last step. I caught it and looked up. Bob was lying on the top step, his paws splayed out, his tail gently wagging. I threw it up to him. He caught it neatly, chewed it for a minute or two with evident relish, then laid it between his paws and gently edged it forward with his nose till he finally bunted it over and it bumped once more down the stairs, Bob wagging his tail furiously as he watched its progress.

"He'll stay like that for hours, sir. Regular game of his. He'd go on all day at it. That'll do now, Bob. The gentlemen have got something else to do than play with you."

A dog is a great promoter of friendly intercourse. Our interest and liking for Bob had quite broken down the natural stiffness of the good servant. As we went up to the bedroom floors, our guide was talking quite garrulously as she gave us accounts of Bob's wonderful sagacity. The ball had been left at the foot of the stairs. As we passed him, Bob gave us a look of deep disgust and stalked down in a dignified fashion to retrieve it. As we turned to the right I saw him slowly coming up again with it in his mouth, his gait that of an extremely old man forced by unthinking persons to exert himself unduly.

As we went round the bedrooms, Poirot began gradually to draw our conductress out.

"There were four Miss Arundells lived here, did they not?" he asked.

"Originally, yes, sir, but that was before my time. There was only Miss Agnes and Miss Emily when I came and Miss Agnes died soon afterwards. She was the youngest of the family. It seemed odd she should go before her sister."

"I suppose she was not so strong as her sister?"

"No, sir, it's odd that. My Miss Arundell, Miss Emily, she was always the delicate one. She's had a lot to do with doctors all her life. Miss Agnes was always strong and robust and yet she went first, and Miss Emily who'd been delicate from a child outlived all the family. Very odd the way things happen."

"Astonishing how often that is the case."

Poirot plunged into (I felt sure) a wholly mendacious story of an invalid uncle which I will not trouble to repeat here. It suffices to say that it had its effect. Discussions of death and such matters do more to unlock the human tongue than any other subject. Poirot was in a position to ask questions that would have been regarded with suspicious hostility twenty minutes earlier.

"Was Miss Arundell's illness a long and painful one?"

"No, I wouldn't say that, sir. She'd been ailing. If you know what I mean, for a long time—ever since two winters before. Very bad she was then—this here jaundice. Yellow in the face they go and the whites of their eyes—"

"Ah, yes, indeed—" (Anecdote of Prince's cousin who appeared to have been the Yellow Peril in person.)

"That's right—just as you say, sir. Family she was, poor dear. Couldn't keep anything down. If you ask me, Dr. Grainger hardly thought she'd get through. But he'd a wonderful way with her—calming you know. 'Made up your mind to lie back and order your tombstone?' he'd say. And she'd say, 'I've a bit of fight in me still, Doctor,' and he'd say, 'That's right—that's what I like to hear.' A hospital nurse we had and she made up her mind that it was all over—over and in the doctor once that she supposed she'd leave her with the old lady too much by forcing her to take food—but the doctor rounded on her. 'Nonsense!' he said. 'What her? You've got to bully her into eating something.' Valentine's beef juice at such and such a time. Brand's essence—teaspoonfuls of brandy. And at the end he said something that I've never forgotten. 'Take young my girl,' he said to her. 'I'm don't notice that the fighting material there is in you. It's young people who turn up their toes and die because they're not interested enough to live.'"

did. A stuck-up young thing she was, all starched collars and cuffs and the waiting on she had to have and tea at all hours."

"A fine recovery."

"Yes, indeed, sir. Of course, the mistress had to be careful as to diet at first, everything boiled and steamed, no grease in the cooking, and she wasn't allowed to eat eggs either. Very monotonous it was for her."

"Still, the main thing is she got well."

"Yes, sir. Of course, she had her little turns. What I'd call bilious attacks. She wasn't always very careful about her food after a time—but still they weren't very serious until the last attack."

"Was it like her illness of two years before?"

"Yes, just the same sort of thing, sir. That nasty jaundice—an awful yellow colour again—and terrible sickness and all the rest of it. Brought it on herself, I'm afraid she did, poor dear. Ate a lot of things she shouldn't have done. That very evening she was took bad she'd had curry for supper and as you know, sir, curry's rich and a bit oily."

"Her illness came on suddenly, did it?"

"Well, it seemed so, sir, but Dr. Grainger, he said it had been working up for some time. A chill—the weather had been very changeable—and too rich feeding."

"Surely her companion—Miss Lawson was her companion, was she not—could have dissuaded her from rich dishes?"

"Oh, I don't think Miss Lawson would have much say. Miss Arundell wasn't one to take orders from any one."

"Had Miss Lawson been with her during her previous illness?"

"No, she came after that. She'd been with her about a year."

"I suppose she'd had companions before that?"

"Oh, quite a number, sir."

"Her companions didn't stay as long as her servants," said Poirot, smiling.

The woman flushed.

"Well, you see, sir, it was different. Miss Arundell didn't get out much and what with one thing and another—" She paused.

Poirot eyed her for a minute, then he said :

"I understand a little the mentality of elderly ladies. They crave, do they not, for novelty. They get, perhaps to the end of a person."

"Well, now, that's very clever of you, sir. You're in it exactly. When a new lady came Miss Arundell was always interested to start with—about her life and her childhood and where she'd been and what she thought about things, and then, when she knew all about her, well, she'd get—well, I suppose bored is the real word."

"Exactly. And between you and me, these ladies who go as companions, they are not usually very interesting—very amusing, eh?"

"No, indeed, sir. They're poor-spirited women most of them. Downright foolish, now and then. Miss Arundell soon got through with them, so to speak, and then she'd make a change and have some one else."

"She must have been unusually attached to Miss Lawson though."

"Oh, I don't think so, sir."

"Miss Lawson was not in any way remarkable."

"I shouldn't have said so, sir. Quite an ordinary person."

"You liked her, yes?"

The woman shrugged her shoulders.

"There wasn't anything to her—she was a regular old maid and she was a little bit of a spirit."

"Spirits?" Poirot looked at her.

"Yes, sir, spirits. Sometimes the living and dead people came back to her. I don't know how right irreligious I call that, but I don't think the souls had their rights."

"So Miss Lawson was a believer, too?"

"Miss Lawson was a believer, too. There was the other. There was the other."

"But she wasn't?" Poirot persisted.

"The mistress had too much sense." She snorted. "Mind you, I don't say it didn't *amuse* her. 'I'm willing to be convinced,' she'd say. But she'd often look at Miss Lawson as much as to say, 'My poor dear, what a fool you are to be so taken in!'"

"I comprehend. She did not believe in it, but it was a source of amusement to her."

"That's right, sir. I sometimes wondered if she didn't—well, have a bit of quiet fun, so to speak, pushing the table and that sort of thing. And the others all as serious as death."

"The others?"

"Miss Lawson and the two Miss Tripps."

"Miss Lawson was a very convinced spiritualist?"

"Took it all for gospel, sir."

"And Miss Arundell was very attached to Miss Lawson, of course."

It was the second time Poirot had made this certain remark and he got the same response.

"Well, hardly that, sir."

"But surely," said Poirot, "if she left her everything—She did, did she not?"

The change was immediate. The human being vanished. The correct maid-servant returned. The woman drew herself up and said in a colourless voice that held reproof for familiarity in it:

"The way the mistress left her money is hardly my business, sir."

I felt that Poirot had bungled the job. Having got the woman in a friendly mood, he was now proceeding to throw away his advantage. He was wise enough to make no immediate attempt to recover lost ground. After a commonplace remark about the size and number of the bedrooms he went towards the head of the stairs.

Bob had disappeared, but as I came to the stair-head, I stumbled and nearly fell. Catching at the baluster to steady myself I looked down and saw that I had inadvertently placed my foot on Bob's ball which he had left lying on the top of the stairs.

The woman apologized quickly.

"I'm sorry, sir. It's Bob's fault. He leaves his ball there. And you can't see it against the dark carpet. Death of some one some day it'll be. The poor mistress had a nasty fall through it. Might easily have been the death of her."

Poirot stopped suddenly on the stairs.

"She had an accident, you say?"

"Yes, sir. Bob left his ball there, as he often did, and the mistress came out of her room and fell over it and went right down the stairs. Might have been killed."

"Was she much hurt?"

"Not as much as you'd think. Very lucky she was, Dr. Grainger said. Cut her head a little, and strained her back and of course there were bruises and it was a nasty shock. She was in bed for about a week, but it wasn't serious."

"Was this long ago?"

"Just a week or two before she died."

Poirot stooped to recover something he had dropped.

"Pardon—my fountain pen—ah, yes, there it is."

He stood up again.

"He is careless, this Master Bob," he observed.

"Ah, well, he don't know no better, sir," said the woman in an indulgent voice. "Nearly human he may be, but you can't have everything. The mistress, you see, usedn't to sleep well at nights and often she'd get up and wander downstairs and round and about the house."

"She did that often?"

"Most nights. But she wouldn't have Miss Lawson or any one fussing after her."

Poirot had turned into the drawing-room again.

"A beautiful room this," he observed. "I wonder, would there be space in this recess for my bookcase? What do you think, Hastings?"

Quite fogged I remarked cautiously that it would be difficult to say.

"Yes, sizes are so deceptive. Take, I pray you, my little rule and measure the width of it and I will write it down."

Obediently I took the folding rule that Poirot handed me and took various measurements under his direction whilst he wrote on the back of an envelope.

I was just wondering why he adopted such an untidy and uncharacteristic method of making a neat entry in his little pocket-book when he handed the envelope to me, saying :

"That is right, is it not? Perhaps you had better verify it."

There were no figures on the envelope. Instead was written : "When we go upstairs again, pretend to remember an appointment and ask if you can telephone. Let the woman come with you and delay her as long as you can."

"That's all right," I said, pocketing the envelope. "I should say both bookcases would go in perfectly."

"It is as well to be sure, though. I think, if it is not too much trouble, I would like to look at the principal bedroom again. I am not quite sure of the wall space there."

"Certainly, sir. It's no trouble."

We went up again. Poirot measured a portion of wall, and was just commenting aloud on the respective possible positions of bed, wardrobe and writing-table when I looked at my watch, gave a somewhat exaggerated start and exclaimed :

"By Jove, do you know it's three o'clock already? What will Anderson think? I ought to telephone to him." I turned to the woman. "I wonder if I might use your telephone if you have one."

"Why, certainly, sir. It's in the little room off the hall. I'll show you."

She bustled down with me, indicating the instrument, and then I got her to help me in finding a number in the telephone directory. In the end I made a call—to a Mr. Anderson in the neighbouring town of Harchester. Fortunately he was out and I was able to leave a message saying it was unimportant and that I would ring up later!

When I emerged Poirot had descended the staircase and was standing in the hall. His eyes had a slightly

green tinge. I had no clue to his excitement, but I realized that he *was* excited.

Poirot said :

"That fall from the top of the stairs must have given your mistress a great shock. Did she seem perturbed about Bob and his ball after it?"

"It's funny your saying that, sir. It worried her a lot. Why, just as she was dying, she was delirious and she rambled on a lot about Bob and his ball and something about a picture that was ajar."

"A picture that was ajar," said Poirot thoughtfully.

"Of course, it didn't make sense, sir, but she was rambling, you see."

"One moment—I must just go into the drawing-room once more."

He wandered round the room, examining the ornaments. In especial, one big jar with a lid on it seemed to attract him. It was not, I fancy, a particularly good bit of china. A piece of Victorian humour—it had on it a rather crude picture of a bulldog sitting outside a front door with a mournful expression on its face. Below was written : *Out all night and no key.*

Poirot, whose taste I have always been convinced is hopelessly bourgeois, seemed lost in admiration.

"*Out all night and no key,*" he murmured. "It is amusing, that! Is that true of our Master Bob? Does he sometimes stay out all night?"

"Very occasional, sir. Oh, very occasional. He's a very good dog, Bob is."

"I am sure he is. But even the best of dogs—"

"Oh, it's quite true, sir. Once or twice he's gone off and come home perhaps at four in the morning. Then he sits down on the step and barks till he's let in."

"Who lets him in—Miss Lawson?"

"Well, any one who hears him, sir. It was Miss Lawson, sir, last time. It was the night of the mistress's accident. And Bob came home about five. Miss Lawson hurried down to let him in before he could make a noise. She was afraid of waking up the mistress and hadn't told her Bob was missing for fear of worrying her."

"I see. She thought it was better Miss Arundell shouldn't be told?"

"That's what she said, sir. She said, 'He's sure to come back. He always does, but she might worry and that would never do.' So we didn't say anything."

"Was Bob fond of Miss Lawson?"

"Well, he was rather contemptuous of her if you know what I mean, sir. Dogs can be. She was kind to him. Called him a good doggie and a nice doggie, but he used to look at her kind of scornful like and he didn't pay any attention at all to what she told him to do."

Poirot nodded. "I see," he said.

Suddenly he did something which startled me.

He pulled a letter from his pocket—the letter he had received this morning.

"Ellen," he said, "do you know anything about this?"

The change that came over Ellen's face was remarkable.

Her jaw dropped and she stared at Poirot with an almost comical expression of bewilderment.

"Well," she ejaculated. "I never did!"

The observation lacked coherency, perhaps, but it left no doubt of Ellen's meaning.

Gathering her wits about her she said slowly :

"Are you the gentleman that letter was written to, then?"

"I am. I am Hercule Poirot."

Like most people, Ellen had not glanced at the name on the order Poirot had held out to her on his arrival. She nodded her head slowly.

"That was it," she said. "Hercules Poirot." She added an S to the Christian name and sounded the T of the surname.

"My word!" she exclaimed. "*Cook will be surprised.*"

Poirot said quickly :

"Would it not be advisable, perhaps, for us to go to the kitchen and there, in company with your friend, we could talk the matter over?"

"Well—if you don't mind, sir."

Ellen sounded just a little doubtful. This particular social dilemma was clearly new to her. But Poirot's matter-of-fact manner reassured her and we departed

forthwith to the kitchen, Ellen elucidating the situation to a large, pleasant-faced woman who was just lifting a kettle from a gas ring.

"You'll never believe it, Annie. This is actually the gentleman that letter was to. You know, the one I found in the blotter."

"You must remember I am in the dark," said Poirot. "Perhaps you will tell me how the letter came to be posted so late in the day?"

"Well, sir, to tell the truth I didn't know what to do. Neither of us did, did we?"

"Indeed, we didn't," the cook confirmed.

"You see, sir, when Miss Lawson was turning out things after the mistress's death a good lot of things were given away or thrown away. Among them was a little papermatchie, I think they call it, blotter. Very pretty it was, with a lily of the valley on it. The mistress always used it when she wrote in bed. Well, Miss Lawson didn't want it, so she gave it to me along with a lot of other little odds and ends that had belonged to the mistress. I put it away in a drawer, and it wasn't till yesterday that I took it out. I was going to put some new blotting-paper in it so that it was ready for me to use. There was a sort of pocket inside and I just slipped my hand in it when what should I find but a letter in the mistress's handwriting, tucked away.

"Well, as I say, I didn't know rightly what to do about it. It was the mistress's hand all right, and I saw as she'd written it and slipped it in there waiting to post it the next day and then she'd forgot, which is the kind of thing she did many a time, poor dear. Once it was a dividend warrant to her bank and no one could think where it had got to, and at last it was found pushed right back in the pigeonholes of the desk."

"Was she untidy?"

"Oh, no, sir, just the opposite. She was always putting things away and clearing them up. That was half the trouble. If she'd left things about it would really have been better. It was their being tidied away and then forgotten that was always happening."

"Things like Bob's ball, for instance?" asked Poirot with a smile.

The sagacious terrier had just trotted in from outdoors and greeted us anew in a very friendly manner.

"Yes, indeed, sir. As soon as Bob finished playing with his ball she'd put it away. But that was all right because it had its own place—in the drawer I showed you."

"I see. But I interrupted you. Pray go on. You discovered the letter in the blotter?"

"Yes, sir, that was the way of it, and I asked Annie what she thought I'd better do. I didn't like to put it in the fire—and, of course, I couldn't take upon myself to open it, and neither Annie nor I could see that it was any business of Miss Lawson's, so after we'd talked it over a bit, I just put a stamp on it and ran out to the post box and posted it."

Poirot turned slightly to me. "*Voilà*," he murmured. I could not help saying maliciously :

"Amazing how simple an explanation can be!"

I thought he looked a little crestfallen and rather wished I hadn't been so quick to try and rub it in.

He turned again to Ellen.

"As my friend says : How simple an example can be! You understand, when I received a letter dated over two months ago I was somewhat surprised."

"Yes, I suppose you must have been, sir. We didn't think of that."

"Also—" Poirot coughed. "I am in a little dilemma. That letter, you see—it was a commission with which Miss Arundell wished to entrust me. A matter of a somewhat private character." He cleared his throat importantly. "Now that Miss Arundell is dead I am in some doubt how to act. Would Miss Arundell have wished me to undertake the commission in these circumstances or not? It is difficult—very difficult."

Both women were looking at him respectfully.

"I shall have, I think, to consult Miss Arundell's lawyer. She had a lawyer, did she not?"

Ellen answered quickly :

"Oh, yes, sir. Mr. Purvis from Harchester."

"He knew all her affairs?"

"I think so, sir. He's done everything for her ever since I can remember. It was him she sent for after the fall she had."

"The fall down the stairs?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now let me see, when was that exactly?"

The cook broke in.

"Day after Bank Holiday it was, I remember that well. I stayed in to oblige on Bank Holiday, seeing she had all those people staying, and I had the day on Wednesday instead."

Poirot had whipped out his pocket almanac.

"Precisely—precisely. Easter Bank Holiday, I see, fell on the thirteenth this year. Then Miss Arundell had her accident on the fourteenth. This letter to me was written three days later. A pity that it was never sent. However, it may still not be too late—" He paused. "I rather fancy that the—er—commission she wished me to perform was connected with one of the—er—guests you mentioned just now."

This remark, which could only have been a pure shot in the dark, met with immediate response. A quick look of intelligence passed across Ellen's face. She turned to the cook who gave her back an answering glance.

"That'll be Mr. Charles," she said.

"If you would tell me just who was there—" Poirot suggested.

"Dr. Tanios and his wife, Miss Bella that was, and Miss Theresa and Mr. Charles."

"They were all nephews and nieces?"

"That's right, sir. Dr. Tanios, of course, is no relation. In fact, he's a foreigner, a Greek or something of the sort, I believe. He married Miss Bella, Miss Arundell's niece, her sister's child. Mr. Charles and Miss Theresa are brother and sister."

"Ah, yes, I see. A family party. And when did they leave?"

"On the Wednesday morning, sir. And Dr. Tanios

and Miss Bella came down again the next week-end because they were worried about Miss Arundell."

"And Mr. Charles and Miss Theresa?"

"They came the week-end after. The week-end before she died."

Poirot's curiosity, I felt, was quite insatiable. I could see no point in these continued questions. He got the explanation of his mystery, and in my opinion the sooner he retired with dignity the better.

The thought seemed to go from my brain to his.

"*Eh bien*," he said. "This information you have given me is very helpful. I must consult this Mr. Purvis, I think you said? Thank you very much for all your help."

He stooped and patted Bob.

"*Brave chien, va!* You loved your mistress."

Bob responded amiably to these overtures and hopeful of a little play went and fetched a large piece of coal. For this he was reproved and the coal removed from him. He sent me a glance in search of sympathy.

"These women," it seemed to say. "Generous with the food, but not really sportsmen!"

CHAPTER IX

Reconstruction of the Dog's Ball Incident

"Well, Poirot," I said as the gate of Littlegreen House closed behind us. "You are satisfied now, I hope!"

"Yes, my friend. I am satisfied."

"Thank Heaven for that! All the mysteries explained! The Wicked Companion and the Rich Old Lady myth exploded. The delayed letter and even the famous incident of the dog's ball shown in their true colours. Everything settled satisfactorily and according to Cocker!"

Poirot gave a dry little cough and said:

"I would not use the word *satisfactorily*, Hastings."

"You did a minute ago."

"No, no. I did not say the matter was *satisfactory*

I said that, personally, my curiosity was *satisfied*. I know the truth of the Dog's Ball incident."

"And very simple it was too!"

"Not quite so simple as you think." He nodded his head several times. Then he went on: "You see, I know one little thing which you do not."

"And what is that?" I asked somewhat sceptically.

"*I know that there is a nail driven into the skirting board at the top of the stairs.*"

I stared at him. His face was quite grave.

"Well," I said after a minute or two. "Why shouldn't there be?"

"The question is, Hastings, why should there be?"

"How do I know? Some household reason, perhaps. Does it matter?"

"Certainly it matters. And I can think of no household reason for a nail to be driven in at the top of the skirting board in that particular place. It was carefully varnished, too, so as not to show."

"What are you driving at, Poirot? Do *you* know the reason?"

"I can imagine it quite easily. If you wanted to stretch a piece of strong thread or wire across the top of the stairs about a foot from the ground, you could tie it one side to the balusters, but on the inner wall side you would need something like a nail to attach the thread to."

"Poirot!" I cried. "What on earth are you driving at?"

"*Mon cher ami*, I am reconstructing the incident of the Dog's Ball! Would you like to hear my reconstruction?"

"Go ahead."

"*Eh bien*, here it is. Some one had noticed the fact Bob had of leaving his ball at the top of the stairs. A dangerous thing to do—it might lead to an accident." Poirot paused a minute, then said in a slightly different tone, "If you wished to kill some one, Hastings, how would you set about it?"

"I—well, really—I don't know. Fate up some ~~and~~ or something, I suppose."

"A proceeding, I assure you, both difficult and dangerous. But then you are not the type of a cold-blooded cautious murderer. Does it not strike you that the *easiest* way of removing some one you want to remove from your path is to take advantage of *accident*? Accidents are happening all the time. And sometimes—Hastings—they *can be helped to happen!*"

He paused a minute, then went on :

"I think the dog's ball left fortuitously at the top of the stairs gave our murderer an idea. Miss Arundell was in the habit of coming out of her room in the night and wandering about—her eyesight was not good; it was quite within the bounds of probability that she might stumble over it and fall headlong down those stairs. But a careful murderer does not leave things to chance. *A thread* stretched across the top of the stairs would be a much better way. It would send her pitching head foremost. Then, when the household came rushing out—there, plain to see, is the *cause* of the accident—*Bob's ball!*"

"How horrible!" I cried.

Poirot said gravely :

"Yes, it was horrible.... It was also unsuccessful.... Miss Arundell was very little hurt, though she might easily have broken her neck. Very disappointing for our unknown friend! But Miss Arundell was a sharp-witted old lady. Every one told her she had slipped on the ball, and there the ball was as evidence, but she herself, recalling the happening, felt that the accident had arisen differently. She had *not* slipped on the ball. And in addition she remembered something else. *She remembered hearing Bob barking for admission at five o'clock the next morning.*

"This, I admit, is something in the way of guess-work, but I believe I am right. *Miss Arundell had put away Bob's ball herself* the evening before in its drawer. After that he went out *and did not return*. In that case, *it was not Bob* who put that ball on the top of the stairs."

"That is pure guess-work, Poirot," I objected.

He demurred.

"Not quite, my friend. There are the significant words uttered by Miss Arundell when she was delirious—something about Bob's ball and a 'picture ajar.' You see the point, do you not?"

"Not in the least."

"Curious. I know your language well enough to realize that one does not talk of a picture being *ajar*. A door is *ajar*. A picture is *awry*."

"Or simply crooked."

"Or simply crooked, as you say. So I realize at once that Ellen has mistaken the meaning of the words she heard. It is not *ajar*—but a or the jar that was meant. Now in the drawing-room there is a rather noticeable china jar. There is, I have already observed, a picture of a dog on it. With the remembrance of these delirious ravings in my mind I go up and examine it more closely. I find that it deals with the subject of *a dog who has been out all night*. You see the trend of the feverish woman's thoughts? Bob was like the dog in the picture on the jar—out all night—so it was not he who left the ball on the stairs."

I cried out, feeling some admiration in spite of myself.

"You're an ingenious devil, Poirot! How you think of these things beats me!"

"I do not 'think of them.' They are *there*—plain—for any one to see. *Eh bien*, you realize the position? Miss Arundell, lying in bed after her fall, becomes suspicious. That suspicion she feels is perhaps fanciful and absurd, but there it is. '*Since the incident of the Dog's Ball I have been increasingly uneasy*.' And so—and so she writes to me, and by a piece of bad luck her letter does not reach me until over two months have gone by. Tell me, does her letter not fit in *perfectly* with these facts?"

"Yes," I admitted. "It does."

Poirot went on:

"There is another point worthy of consideration. Miss Lawson was exceedingly anxious that the fact of Bob's being out all night should not get to Miss Arundell's ears."

"You think that she—"

"I think that the fact should be noted very carefully." I turned the thing over in my mind for a minute or two.

"Well," I said at last with a sigh, "it's all very interesting—as a mental exercise, that is. And I take off my hat to you. It's been a masterful piece of reconstruction. It's almost a pity really that the old lady has died."

"A pity—yes. She wrote to me that some one had attempted to murder her (that is what it amounts to, after all) and a very short time after, she was dead."

"Yes," I said, "and it's a grand disappointment to you that she died a natural death, isn't it? Come, admit it."

Poirot shrugged his shoulders.

"Or perhaps you think she was poisoned," I said maliciously.

Poirot shook his head somewhat despondently.

"It certainly seems," he admitted, "as though Miss Arundell died from natural causes."

"And therefore," I said, "we return to London with our tail between our legs."

"*Pardon*, my friend, but we do *not* return to London."

"What do you mean, Poirot?" I cried.

"If you show the dog the rabbit, my friend, does he return to London? No, he goes into the rabbit hole."

"What do you mean?"

"The dog hunts rabbits. Hercule Poirot hunts murderers. We have here a murderer—a murderer whose crime failed, yes, perhaps, but nevertheless a murderer. And I, my friend, am going into the burrow after him—or her as the case may be."

He turned sharply in at the gate.

"Where are you off to, Poirot?"

"Into the burrow, my friend. This is the house of Dr. Grainger who attended Miss Arundell in her last illness."

Dr. Grainger was a man of sixty odd. His face was thin and bony with an aggressive chin, bushy eyebrows, and a pair of very shrewd grey eyes. He looked keenly from me to Poirot.

"Well, what can I do for you?" he asked abruptly.

Poirot swept into speech in the most flamboyant manner. "I must apologize, Dr. Grainger, for this intrusion. I must confess straightaway that I do not come to consult you professionally."

Dr. Grainger said drily :

"Glad to hear it. You look healthy enough!"

"I must explain the purpose of my visit," went on Poirot. "The truth of the matter is that I am writing a book—the life of the late General Arundell, who I understand lived in Market Basing for some years before his death."

The doctor looked rather surprised.

"Yes, General Arundell lived here till his death. At Littlegreen House—just up the road past the Bank—you've been there perhaps?" Poirot nodded assent. "But you understand that was a good bit before my time. I came here in 1919."

"You knew his daughter, however, the late Miss Arundell?"

"I knew Emily Arundell well."

"You comprehend, it has been a severe blow to me to find that Miss Arundell has recently died."

"End of April."

"So I discovered. I counted, you see, on her giving me various personal details and reminiscences of her father."

"Quite—quite. But I don't see what I can do about it."

Poirot asked :

"General Arundell has no other sons or daughters living?"

"No. All dead, the lot of them."

"How many were there?"

"Five. Four daughters, one son."

"And in the next generation?"

"Charles Arundell and his sister Teresa. You could get on to them. I doubt, though, if it would be much use to you. The young generation doesn't take much interest in its grandfathers. And there's a Mrs. Tait, but I doubt if you'd get much from her."

"They might have ~~some~~ ~~more~~ ~~children~~?"

"It is possible, perhaps," he suggested, "that there are old family letters and documents in this Miss—er—Lawson's possession?"

"Might be," agreed Grainger. "Usually are a lot of things tucked away in an old maid's house. I don't suppose Miss Lawson's been through half of it yet."

Poirot rose.

"Thank you very much, Dr. Grainger. You have been most kind."

"Don't thank me," said the doctor. "Sorry I can't do anything helpful. Miss Peabody's your best chance. Lives at Morton Manor—about a mile out."

Poirot was sniffing at a large bouquet of roses on the doctor's table.

"Delicious," he murmured.

"Yes, I suppose so. Can't smell 'em myself. Lost my sense of smell when I had flu four years ago. Nice admission for a doctor, eh? 'Physician, heal thyself.' Damned nuisance. Can't enjoy a smoke as I used to."

"Unfortunate, yes. By the way, you *will* give me young Arundell's address?"

"I can get it for you, yes." He ushered us out into the hall and called, "Donaldson."

"My partner," he explained. "He should have it all right. He's by way of being engaged to Charles's sister, Theresa."

He called again : "Donaldson."

A young man came out from a room at the back of the house. He was of medium height and of rather colourless appearance. His manner was precise. A greater contrast to Dr. Grainger could not be imagined.

The latter explained what he wanted.

Dr. Donaldson's eyes, very pale blue eyes slightly prominent, swept over us, appraisingly. When he spoke it was in a dry, precise manner.

"I don't know exactly where Charles is to be found," he said. "I can give you Miss Theresa Arundell's address. Doubtless she will be able to put you in touch with her brother."

Poirot assured him that that would do perfectly.

Morton Manor proved to be an ugly substantial house of the Victorian period. A decrepit butler received us somewhat doubtfully and presently returned to ask if we had an appointment.

"Please tell Miss Peabody that we come from Dr. Grainger," said Poirot.

After a wait of a few minutes, the door opened and a short, fat woman waddled into the room. Her sparse, white hair was neatly parted in the middle. She wore a black velvet dress, the nap of which was completely rubbed off in various places, and some really beautiful fine point lace was fastened at her neck with a large cameo brooch.

She came across the room peering at us short-sightedly. Her first words were somewhat of a surprise.

"Got anything to sell?"

"Nothing, madame," said Poirot.

"Sure?"

"But absolutely."

"No vacuum cleaners?"

"No."

"No stockings?"

"No."

"No rugs?"

"No."

"Oh, well," said Miss Peabody, settling herself in a chair, "I suppose it's all right. You'd better sit down then." We sat obediently.

"You'll excuse my asking," said Miss Peabody with a trace of apology in her manner. "Got to be careful. You wouldn't believe the people who come along. Servants are no good. They can't tell. Can't blame 'em either. Right voices, right clothes, right names. How are they to tell? Commander Ridgeway, Mr. Scot Edgerton, Captain D'Arcy Fitzherbert. Nice-looking fellows, some of 'em. But before you know where you are they've shoved a cream-making machine under your nose."

Poirot said earnestly :

"I assure you, madame, that we have nothing whatever of that kind."

"Well, you should know," said Miss Peabody. Poirot plunged into his story. Miss Peabody heard him out without comment, blinking once or twice out of her small eyes. At the end she said :

"Goin' to write a book, eh?"

"Yes."

"In English?"

"Certainly—in English."

"But you're a foreigner. Eh? Come now, you're foreigner, aren't you?"

"That is true."

She transferred her gaze to me.

"You are his secretary, I suppose?"

"Er—yes," I said doubtfully.

"Can you write decent English?"

"I hope so."

"H'm—where did you go to school?"

"Eton."

"Then you can't."

I was forced to let this sweeping charge against an old and venerable centre of education pass unchallenged as Miss Peabody turned her attention once more to Poirot.

"Goin' to write a life of General Arundell, eh?"

"Yes. You knew him, I think."

"Yes, I knew John Arundell. He drank."

There was a momentary pause. Then Miss Peabody went on musingly :

"Indian Mutiny, eh? Seems a bit like flogging a dead horse to me. But that's your business."

"You know, madame, there is a fashion in these things. At the moment India is the mode."

"Something in that. Things do come round. Look at sleeves."

We maintained a respectful silence.

"Leg o' muttons were always ugly," said Miss Peabody. "But I always looked well in Bishops." She fixed a bright eye on Poirot. "Now then, what do you want to know?"

Poirot spread out his hands.

"Anything! Family history. Gossip. Home life."

"Can't tell you anything about India," said Miss Peabody. "Truth is, I didn't listen. — Rather boring these old men and their anecdotes. He was a very stupid man—but I dare say none the worse General for that. I've always heard that intelligence didn't get you far in the army. Pay attention to your Colonel's wife and listen respectfully to your superior officers and you'll get on—that's what my father used to say."

Treating this dictum respectfully, Poirot allowed a moment or two to elapse before he said :

"You knew the Arundell family intimately, did you not?"

"Knew 'em all," said Miss Peabody. "Matilda, she was the eldest. A spotty girl. Used to teach in Sunday School. Was sweet on one of the curates. Then there was Emily. Good seat on a horse, she had. She was the only one who could do anything with her father when he had one of his bouts on. Cartloads of bottles used to be taken out of that house. Buried them at night, they did. Then, let me see, who came next, Arabella or Thomas? Thomas, I think. Always felt sorry for Thomas. One man and four women. Makes a man look a fool. He was a bit of an old woman himself, Thomas was. Nobody thought he'd ever marry. Bit of a shock when he did."

She chuckled—a rich Victorian fruity chuckle.

It was clear that Miss Peabody was enjoying herself. As an audience we were almost forgotten. Miss Peabody was well away in the past.

"Then came Arabella. Plain girl. Face like a scone. She married all right though, even if she were the plainest of the family. Professor at Cambridge. Quite an old man. Must have been sixty if he was a day. He gave a series of lectures here—on the wonders of Modern Chemistry, I think it was. I went to 'em. He mumbled, I remember. Had a beard. Couldn't hear much of what he said. Arabella used to stay behind and ask questions. She wasn't a chicken herself. Must have been getting on for forty. Ah, well, they're both dead

now. Quite a happy marriage it was. There's something to be said for marrying a plain woman—you know the worst at once and she's not so likely to be flighty. Then there was Agnes. She was the youngest—the pretty one. Rather gay we used to think her. Almost fast! Odd, you'd think if any of them had married it would have been Agnes, but she didn't. She died not long after the war."

Poirot murmured : "You said that Mr. Thomas's marriage was rather unexpected."

Again Miss Peabody produced that rich, throaty chuckle.

"Unexpected? I should say it was! Made a nine days' scandal. You'd never have thought it of him—such a quiet, timid, retiring man and devoted to his sisters."

She paused a minute.

"Remember a case that made rather a stir in the late nineties? Mrs. Varley? Supposed to have poisoned her husband with arsenic. Good-looking woman. Made a big to-do, that case. She was acquitted. Well, Thomas Arundell quite lost his head. Used to get all the papers and read about the case and cut out the photographs of Mrs. Varley. And would you believe it, when the trial was over, off he went to London and asked her to marry him? Thomas! Quiet, stay-at-home Thomas! Never can tell with men, can you? They're always liable to break out."

"And what happened?"

"Oh, she married him all right."

"It was a great shock to his sisters?"

"I should think so! They wouldn't receive her. I don't know that I blame them, all things considered. Thomas was mortally offended. He went off to live in the Channel Islands and nobody heard any more of him. Don't know whether his wife poisoned her first husband. She didn't poison Thomas. He survived her by three years. There were two children, boy and girl. Good-looking pair—took after their mother."

"I suppose they came here to their aunt a good deal?"

"Not till after their parents died. They were at school and almost grown-up by then. They used to come for holidays. Emily was alone in the world then and they and Bella Biggs were the only kith and kin she had."

"Biggs?"

"Arabella's daughter. Dull girl—some years older than Theresa. Made a fool of herself, though. Married some foreigner who was over at the University. A Greek doctor. Dreadful-looking man—got rather a charming manner, though, I must admit. Well, I don't suppose poor Bella had many chances. Spent her time helping her father or holding wool for her mother. This fellow was exotic. It appealed to her."

"Has it been a happy marriage?"

Miss Peabody snapped out :

"I wouldn't like to say for certain about *any* marriage! They *seem* quite happy. Two rather yellow-looking children. They live in Smyrna."

"But they are now in England, are they not?"

"Yes, they came over in March. I rather fancy they'll be going back soon."

"Was Miss Emily Arundell fond of her niece?"

"Fond of Bella? Oh, quite. She's a dull woman—wrapped up in her children and that sort of thing."

"Did she approve of the husband?"

Miss Peabody chuckled.

"She didn't *approve* of him, but I think she rather liked the rascal. He's got brains, you know. If you ask me, he was jockeying her along very nicely. Got a nose for money, that man."

Poirot coughed.

"I understand Miss Arundell died a rich woman?" he murmured.

Miss Peabody settled herself more comfortably in her chair.

"Yes, that's what made all the pother! Nobody dreamed she was quite as well off as she was. How it came about was this way. Old General Arundell left quite a nice little income—divided equally among his son and daughters. Some of it was reinvested, and I think every

investment has done well. There were some original shares of Mortauld. Now, of course, Thomas and Arabella took their shares with them when they married. The other three sisters lived here, and they didn't spend a tenth part of their joint income, it all went back and was reinvested. When Matilda died she left her money to be divided between Emily and Agnes, and when Agnes died she left hers to Emily. And Emily still went on spending very little. Result, she died a rich woman—and the Lawson woman gets it all!"

Miss Peabody brought out the last sentence as a kind of triumphal climax.

"Did that come as a surprise to you, Miss Peabody?"

"To tell you the truth, it did! Emily had always given out quite openly that at her death her money was to be divided between her nieces and her nephew. And as a matter of fact, that was the way it was in the original will. Legacies to the servants and so on and then to be divided between Theresa, Charles and Bella. My goodness, there *was* a to-do when, after her death, it was found she'd made a new will leaving it all to poor Miss Lawson!"

"Was the will made just before her death?"

Miss Peabody directed a sharp glance at him.

"Thinking of undue influence? No, I'm afraid that's no use. And I shouldn't think poor Lawson had the brains or the nerve to attempt anything of the sort. To tell you the truth, she seemed as much surprised as anybody—or said she was!"

Poirot smiled at the addition.

"The will was made about ten days before her death," went on Miss Peabody. "Lawyer says it's all right. Well—it may be."

"You mean—" Poirot leaned forward.

"Hanky-panky, that's what I say," said Miss Peabody. "Something fishy somewhere."

"Just what exactly is your idea?"

"Haven't got one. How should I know where the hanky-panky comes in? I'm not a lawyer. But there's something queer about it, mark my words."

Poirot said slowly :

"Has there been any question of contesting the will?"

"Theresa's taken counsel's opinion, I believe. A lot of good that'll do her! What's a lawyer's opinion nine times out of ten? 'Don't!' Five lawyers advised me once against bringing an action. What did I do? Paid no attention. Won my case too. They had me in the witness box and a clever young whippersnapper from London tried to make me contradict myself. But he didn't manage it. "You can hardly identify these furs positively, Miss Peabody," he said. "There is no furrier's mark on them."

"That may be," I said. "But there's a darn on the lining and if any one can do a darn like that nowadays I'll eat my umbrella." Collapsed utterly, he did."

Miss Peabody chuckled heartily.

"I suppose," said Poirot, cautiously, "that—er—feeling—runs rather high between Miss Lawson and members of Miss Arundell's family?"

"What do you expect? You know what human nature is. Always trouble after a death, anyway. A man or woman is hardly cold in their coffin before most of the mourners are scratching each other's eyes out."

Poirot sighed.

"Too true."

"That's human nature," said Miss Peabody tolerantly. Poirot changed to another subject.

"Is it true that Miss Arundell dabbled in spiritualism?" Miss Peabody's penetrating eye observed him very acutely.

"If you think," she said, "that the spirit of John Arundell came back and ordered Emily to leave her money to Minnie Lawson and that Emily obeyed, I can tell you that you're very much mistaken. Emily wouldn't be that kind of fool. If you ask me, she found spiritualism one degree better than playing patience or cribbage. Seen the Tripps?"

"No."

"If you had, you'd realize just the sort of silliness it was. Irritating women. Always giving you messages

from one or other of your relations—and always totally incongruous ones. They believe it all. So did Minnie Lawson. Oh, well, one way of passing your evenings is as good as another, I suppose."

Poirot tried yet another tack.

"You know young Charles Arundell, I presume? What kind of a person is he?"

"He's no good. Charmin' fellow. Always hard up—always in debt—always returning like a bad penny from all over the world. Knows how to get round women all right." She chuckled. "I've seen too many like him to be taken in! Funny son for Thomas to have had, I must say. He was a staid old foggy if you like. Model of rectitude. Ah, well, bad blood somewhere. Mind you, I *like* the rascal—but he's the kind who would murder his grandmother for a shilling or two quite cheerfully. No moral sense. Odd the way some people seem to be born without it."

"And his sister?"

"Theresa?" Miss Peabody shook her head and said slowly, "I don't know. She's an exotic creature. Not usual. She's engaged to that namby-pamby doctor down here. You've seen him, perhaps?"

"Dr. Donaldson."

"Yes. Clever in his profession, they say. But he's a poor stick in other ways. Not the sort of young man I'd fancy if I were a young girl. Well, Theresa should know her mind. She's had her experiences, I'll be bound."

"Dr. Donaldson did not attend Miss Arundell?"

"He used to when Grainger was away on holiday."

"But not in her last illness?"

"Don't think so."

Poirot said smiling :

"I gather, Miss Peabody, that you don't think much of him as a doctor?"

"Never said so. As a matter of fact, you're wrong. He's sharp enough, and clever enough in his way—but it's not *my* way. Take an instance. In the old days when a child ate too many green apples it had a bilious attack and the doctor called it a bilious attack and went home

and sent you along a few pills from the surgery. Nowadays, you're told the child suffers from pronounced acidosis, that its diet must be supervised and you get the same medicine, only it's in nice little white tablets put up by manufacturing chemists and costs you about three times as much! Donaldson belongs to that school, and, mind you, most young mothers prefer it. It *sounds* better. Not that that young man will be in this place long ministering to measles and bilious attacks. He's got his eye on London. He's ambitious. He means to specialize."

"In any particular line?"

"Serum therapeutics. I think I've got it right. The idea being that you get one of these nasty hypodermic needles stuck into you no matter how well you feel, just in case you should catch something. I don't hold with all these messy injections myself."

"Is Dr. Donaldson experimenting with any particular disease?"

"Don't ask me. All I know is a general practitioner's practice isn't good enough for him. He wants to set up in London. But to do that he's got to have money and he's as poor as a church mouse, whatever a church mouse may be."

Poirot murmured: "Sad that real ability is so often baulked by lack of money. And yet there are people who do not spend a quarter of their incomes."

"Emily Arundell didn't," said Miss Peabody. "It was quite a surprise to some people when that will was read. The amount, I mean, not the way it was left."

"Was it a surprise, do you think, to the members of her own family?"

"That's telling," said Miss Peabody, screwing up her eyes with a good deal of enjoyment. "I wouldn't say yes, and I wouldn't say no. One of 'em had a pretty shrewd idea."

"Which one?"

"Master Charles. He'd done a bit of calculation on his own account. He's no fool, Charles."

"But a little bit of a rogue, eh?"

"At any rate, he isn't a namby-pamby stick," said Miss Peabody viciously.

She paused a minute and then asked :

"Going to get in touch with him?"

"That was my intention," Poirot went on solemnly.

"It seems to me possible that he might have certain family papers relating to his grandfather?"

"More likely to have made a bonfire of them. No respect for his elders, that young man."

"One must try all avenues," said Poirot sententiously.

"So it seems," said Miss Peabody drily.

There was a momentary glint in her blue eye that seemed to affect Poirot disagreeably. He rose.

"I must not trespass any longer on your time, madame. I am most grateful for what you have been able to tell me."

"I've done my best," said Miss Peabody. "Seem to have got rather a long way from the Indian Mutiny, don't we?"

She shook hands with us both.

"Let me know when the book comes out," was her parting remark. "I shall be so interested."

And the last thing we heard as we left the room was a rich, throaty chuckle.

CHAPTER XI

Visit to the Misses Tripp

"And now," said Poirot as we re-entered the car, "what do we do next?"

Warned by experience I did not this time suggest a return to town. After all, if Poirot was enjoying himself in his own fashion, why should I object?

I suggested some tea.

"Tea, Hastings? What an idea! Regard the time."

"I have regarded it—looked at it, I mean. It's half-past five. Tea is clearly indicated."

Poirot sighed.

"Always the afternoon tea with you English! No, *mon ami*, no tea for us. In a book of etiquette I read the other day that one must not make the afternoon call after six o'clock. To do so is to commit the solecism. We have, therefore, but half an hour in which to accomplish our purpose."

"How social you are to-day, Poirot! On whom are we calling now?"

"*Les demoiselles Tripp.*"

"Are you writing a book on spiritualism now? Or is it still the life of General Arundell?"

"It will be simpler than that, my friend. But we must inquire where these ladies live."

Directions were forthcoming readily enough, but of a somewhat confused nature, involving as they did a series of lanes. The abode of the Misses Tripp turned out to be a picturesque cottage—so extremely old-world and picturesque that it looked as though it might collapse any minute.

A child of fourteen or thereabouts opened the door and with difficulty squeezed herself against the wall sufficiently to allow us to pass inside.

The interior was very rich in old oak beams—there was a big open fireplace and such very small windows that it was difficult to see clearly. All the furniture was of pseudo-simplicity—ye olde oake for ye cottage dweller—there was a good deal of fruit in wooden bowls and large numbers of photographs—most of them, I noticed, of the same two people represented in different poses—usually with bunches of flowers clasped to their breasts or clutching large leghorn picture-hats.

The child who admitted us had murmured something and disappeared, but her voice was clearly audible in an upper story :

"Two gentlemen to see you, miss."

A sort of twitter of female voices arose and presently with a good deal of creaking and rustling a lady descended the staircase and came graciously towards us.

She was nearer fifty than forty, her hair was parted in

the middle in Madonna fashion, her eyes were brown and slightly prominent. She wore a sprigged muslin dress that conveyed an odd suggestion of fancy dress.

Poirot stepped forward and started the conversation in his most flourishing manner.

"I must apologize for intruding upon you, mademoiselle, but I am in somewhat of a predicament. I came here to find a certain lady, but she has left Market Basing and I was told that you would certainly have her address."

"Really? Who was that?"

"Miss Lawson."

"Oh, Minnie Lawson. Of course! We are the greatest friends. Do sit down, Mr.—er—"

"Parotti—my friend; Captain Hastings."

Miss Tripp acknowledged the introductions and began to fuss a little.

"Sit here, won't you—no, please—really, I always prefer an *upright* chair myself. Now, are you sure you are comfortable there? Dear Minnie Lawson—oh, here is my sister."

More creaking and rustling and we were joined by a second lady, dressed in green gingham that would have been suitable for a girl of sixteen.

"My sister Isabel—Mr.—er—Parrot—and—er—Captain Hawkins. Isabel dear, these gentlemen are friends of Minnie Lawson's."

Miss Isabel Tripp was less buxom than her sister. She might indeed have been described as scraggy. She had very fair hair done up into a large quantity of rather messy curls. She cultivated a girlish manner and was easily recognizable as the subject of most of the flower poses in photography. She clasped her hands now in girlish excitement.

"How delightful! Dear Minnie! You have seen her lately?"

"Not for some years," explained Poirot. "We have quite lost touch with each other: I have been travelling. That is why I was so astonished and delighted to hear of the good fortune that had befallen her."

"Yes, indeed. And so *well* deserved! Minnie is such a rare soul. So simple—so earnest."

"Julia," cried Isabel.

"Yes, Isabel?"

"How remarkable. *P.* You remember the planchette distinctly insisted on *P.* last night. A visitor from over the water and the initial *P.*"

"So it did," agreed Julia.

Both ladies looked at Poirot in rapt and delighted surprise.

"It never lies," said Miss Julia softly.

"Are you interested at all in the occult, Mr. Parrot?"

"I have little experience, mademoiselle, but—like any one who has travelled much in the East, I am bound to admit that there is much one does not understand and that cannot be explained by natural means."

"So true," said Julia. "Profoundly true."

"The East," murmured Isabel. "The home of mysticism and the occult."

Poirot's travelling in the East, as far as I knew, consisted of one journey to Syria extended to Iraq, and which occupied perhaps a few weeks. To judge by his present conversation one would swear that he had spent most of his life in jungles and bazaars and in intimate converse with fakirs, dervishes, and mahatmas.

As far as I could make out the Misses Tripp were vegetarians, theosophists, British Israelites, Christian Scientists, spiritualists and enthusiastic amateur photographers.

"One sometimes feels," said Julia with a sigh, "that Market Basing is an impossible place to live. There is no beauty here—no *soul*. One must have soul, don't you think so, Captain Hawkins?"

"Quite," I said, slightly embarrassed. "Oh, quite."

"*Where there is no vision the people perish,*" quoted Isabel with a sigh. "I have often tried to discuss things with the vicar, but I find him most painfully *narrow*. Don't you think, Mr. Parrot, that any definite creed is bound to be *narrowing*?"

"And everything is so simple, really," put in her sis-

ter. "As we know so well, everything is joy and love!"
"As you say, as you say," said Poirot. "What a pity it seems that misunderstandings and quarrels should arise—especially over money."

"Money is so sordid," sighed Julia.

"I gather that the late Miss Arundell was one of your converts?" said Poirot.

The two sisters looked at each other.

"I wonder," said Isabel.

"We were never quite sure," breathed Julia. "One minute she seemed to be convinced and then she would say something—so—so ribald."

"Ah, but you remember that last manifestation," said Julia. "That was really most remarkable." She turned to Poirot. "It was the night dear Miss Arundell was taken ill. My sister and I went round after dinner and we had a sitting—just the four of us. And you know we saw—we all three saw—*most* distinctly, a kind of halo around Miss Arundell's head."

"Comment?"

"Yes. It was a kind of luminous haze." She turned to her sister. "Isn't that how you would describe it, Isabel?"

"Yes. Yes, just that. A luminous haze gradually surrounding Miss Arundell's head—an aureole of faint light. It was a *sign*—we know that now—a sign that she was about to pass over to the other side."

"Remarkable," said Poirot in a suitably impressed voice. "It was dark in the room, yes?"

"Oh, yes, we always get better results in the dark, and it was quite a warm evening, so we didn't even have the fire on."

"A most interesting spirit spoke to us," said Isabel.

"Fatima, her name was. She told us she had passed over in the time of the Crusades. She gave us a most beautiful message."

"She actually spoke to you?"

"No, not direct voice. She rapped it out. Love. Hope. Life. Beautiful words."

"And Miss Arundell was actually taken ill at the *séance*?"

"It was just after. Some sandwiches and port wine were brought in, and dear Miss Arundell said she wouldn't have any as she wasn't feeling very well. That was the beginning of her illness. Mercifully, she did not have to endure much suffering."

"She passed over four days later," said Isabel.

"And we have already had messages from her," said Julia eagerly. "Saying that she is very happy and that everything is beautiful and that she hopes that there is love and peace among all her dear ones."

Poirot coughed.

"That—er—is hardly the case, I fear."

"The relations have behaved *disgracefully* to poor Minnie," said Isabel. Her face flushed with indignation.

"Minnie is the most *unworldly* soul," chimed in Julia.

"People have gone about saying the *unkindest* things—that she *schemed* for this money to be left her!"

"When really it was the *greatest* surprise to her—"

"She could hardly believe her *ears* when the lawyer read the will—"

"She told us so herself. 'Julia,' she said to me. 'My dear, you could have knocked me over with a feather. Just a few bequests to the servants and then Littlegreen House and the residue of my estate to Wilhelmina Lawson.' She was so flabbergasted she could hardly speak. And when she could she asked how much it would be—thinking perhaps it would be a few thousand pounds—and Mr. Purvis, after humming and hawing and talking about confusing things like gross and net personalities said it would be in the neighbourhood of three hundred and seventy-five thousand pounds. Poor Minnie nearly fainted, she told us."

"She had no *idea*," the other sister reiterated. "She never thought of such a thing happening!"

"That is what she told you, yes?"

"Oh, yes, she repeated it several times. And that's what makes it so wicked of the Arundell family to go on as they have done—cold-shouldering her and treating her with suspicion. After all, this is a free country—"

Isabel drew back a little.

"Oh, well—one would hardly do *that*."

Poirot smiled.

"No, perhaps not...."

"You see, Mr. Parrot," put in Julia, "she regards it as a *trust*—a sacred *trust*."

"And she is quite willing to do something for Mrs. Tanios or for the Tanios children," went on Isabel. "Only she doesn't want *him* to get hold of it."

"She even said she would consider making Theresa an allowance."

"And that, I think, was very generous of her—considering the off-hand way that girl has always treated her."

"Indeed, Mr. Parrot, Minnie is the most *generous* of creatures. But there now, you know her, of course!"

"Yes," said Poirot. "I know her. But I still do not know—her address."

"Of course! How stupid of me! Shall I write it down for you?"

"I can write it down."

Poirot produced the invariable notebook.

"17 Clanroyden Mansions, W.2. Not very far from Whiteleys. You'll give her our love, won't you? We haven't heard from her just lately."

Poirot rose and I followed suit.

"I have to thank you both very much," he declared, "for a most charming talk, as well as for your kindness in supplying me with my friend's address."

"I wonder they didn't give it to you at the house," exclaimed Isabel. "It must be that Ellen! Servants are so *jealous* and so *small-minded*. They used to be quite rude to Minnie sometimes."

Julia shook hands in a *grande dame* manner.

"We have enjoyed your visit," she declared graciously. "I wonder—"

She flashed a glance of inquiry at her sister.

"You would, perhaps—" Isabel flushed a little. "Would you, that is to say, stay and share our evening meal? A very simple one—some shredded, raw vegetables, brown bread and butter, fruit."

"It sounds delicious," Poirot said hastily. "But alas! my friend and I have to return to London."

With renewed handshaking and messages to be delivered to Miss Lawson, we at last made our exit.

CHAPTER XII

Poirot Discusses the Case

"Thank goodness, Poirot," I said with fervour, "you got us out of those raw carrots! What awful women!"

"*Pour nous un bon bifeck*—with the fried potatoes—and a good bottle of wine. What should we have had to drink there, I wonder?"

"Well water, I should think," I replied with a shudder. "Or non-alcoholic cider. It was that kind of place! I bet there's no bath and no sanitation except an earth closet in the garden!"

"Strange how women enjoy living an uncomfortable life," said Poirot thoughtfully. "It is not always poverty though they are good at making the best of straitened circumstances."

"What orders for the chauffeur now?" I asked as I negotiated the last bend of the winding lanes, and we emerged on the road to Market Basing. "On what local light do we call next? Or do we return to The George and interrogate the asthmatic waiter once more?"

"You will be glad to hear, Hastings, that we have finished with Market Basing—"

"Splendid."

"For the moment only. I shall return!"

"Still on the track of your unsuccessful murderer?"

"Exactly."

"Did you learn anything from the fandango of nonsense we've just been listening to?"

Poirot said precisely :

"There were certain points deserving of attention. The various characters in our drama begin to emerge

more clearly. In some ways it resembles, does it not, a novclette of olden days. The humble companion, once despised, is raised to affluence and now plays the part of lady bountiful."

"I should imagine that such a patronage must be very galling to people who regard themselves as the rightful heirs!"

"As you say, Hastings. Yes, that is very true."

We drove on in silence for some minutes. We had passed through Market Basing and were now once more on the main road. I hummed to myself softly the tune of "Little Man, You've Had a Busy Day."

"Enjoyed yourself, Poirot?" I asked at last.

Poirot said coldly :

"I do not know quite what you mean by 'enjoyed yourself,' Hastings."

"Well," I said, "it seemed to me you've been treating yourself to a busman's holiday!"

"You do not think that I am serious?"

"Oh, you're *serious* enough. But this business seems to be of the academic kind. You're tackling it for your own mental satisfaction. What I mean is—it's not *real*."

"*Au contraire*, it is intensely real."

"I express myself badly. What I mean is, if there were a question of *helping* our old lady, of protecting her against further attack—well, there would be some excitement then. But as it is, I can't help feeling that as she is dead, why worry."

"In that case, *mon ami*, one would not investigate a murder case at all!"

"No, no, no. That's quite different. I mean, then you have a *body*.... Oh, dash it all!"

"Do not enrage yourself. I comprehend perfectly. You make a distinction between a *body* and a mere *decease*. Supposing, for instance, that Miss Arundell had died with sudden and alarming violence instead of respectably of a long-standing illness—then you would not remain indifferent to my efforts to discover the truth?"

"Of course I wouldn't."

"But all the same, some one did attempt to murder her?"

"Yes, but they didn't *succeed*. That makes all the difference."

"It does not intrigue you at all to know *who* attempted to kill her?"

"Well, yes, it does in a way."

"We have a very restricted circle," said Poirot musingly. "That thread—"

"The thread which you merely deduce from a nail in the skirting-board!" I interrupted. "Why, that nail may have been there for years!"

"No. The varnish was quite fresh."

"Well, I still think there might be all sorts of explanations of it."

"Give me one."

At the moment I could not think of anything sufficiently plausible. Poirot took advantage of my silence to sweep on with his discourse.

"Yes, a restricted circle. That thread could only have been stretched across the top of the stairs after every one had gone to bed. Therefore we have *only the occupants of the house to consider*. That is to say, the guilt lies between seven people. Dr. Tanios. Mrs. Tanios. Theresa Arundell. Charles Arundell. Miss Lawson. Ellen. Cook."

"Surely you can leave the servants out of it."

"They received legacies, *mon cher*. And there *might* have been other reasons—spite—a quarrel—dishonesty—one cannot be *certain*."

"It seems to me very unlikely."

"Unlikely, I agree. But one must take all possibilities into consideration."

"In that case, you must allow for eight people, not seven."

"How so?"

I felt I was about to score a point.

"You must include *Miss Arundell* herself. How do you know she may not have stretched that thread ~~across~~ the stairs in order to trip up some other member of the house-party?"

Poirot shrugged his shoulders.

"It is a *bêtise* you say there, my friend. If Miss Arundell laid a trap, she would be careful not to fall into it herself. It was *she* who fell down the stairs, remember."

I retired crestfallen.

Poirot went on in a thoughtful voice :

"The sequence of events is quite clear—the fall—the letter to me—the visit of the lawyer—but there is one doubtful point. Did Miss Arundell deliberately hold back the letter to me, hesitating to post it? Or did she, once having written it, assume it *was* posted?"

"That we can't possibly tell," I said.

"No. We can only *guess*. Personally, I fancy that she assumed it had been posted. She must have been surprised at getting no reply...."

My thoughts had been busy in another direction.

"Do you think this spiritualistic nonsense counted at all?" I asked. "I mean, do you think, in spite of Miss Peabody's ridiculing of the suggestion, that a command was given at one of these *séances* that she should alter her will and leave her money to the Lawson woman?"

Poirot shook his head doubtfully.

"That does not seem to fit in with the general impression I have formed of Miss Arundell's character."

"The Tripp women say that Miss Lawson was completely taken aback when the will was read," I said thoughtfully.

"That is what she told them, yes," agreed Poirot.

"But you don't believe it?"

"*Mon ami*—you know my suspicious nature! I believe nothing that any one says unless it can be confirmed or corroborated."

"That's right, old boy," I said affectionately. "A thoroughly nice, trustful nature."

"He says, 'she says, 'they say.' Bah! what does that mean? Nothing at all. It may be absolute truth. It may be useful falsehood. Me, I deal only with *facts*."

"And the facts are?"

"Miss Arundell had a fall. That nobody disputes. The fall was not a natural one—it was contrived."

with enthusiasm Christian Science, vegetarianism, theosophy and spiritualism does not really constitute a damning indictment of those subjects! Because a foolish woman will tell you a lot of nonsense about a fake scarab which she has bought from a rascally dealer, that does not necessarily bring discredit on the general subject of Egyptology!"

"Do you mean you *believe* in spiritualism, Poirot?"

"I have an open mind on the subject. I have never studied any of its manifestations myself, but it must be accepted that many men of science and learning have pronounced themselves satisfied that there are phenomena which cannot be accounted for by—shall we say the credulity of a Miss Tripp?"

"Then you believe in this rigmarole of an aureole of light surrounding Miss Arundell's head?"

Poirot waved a hand.

"I was speaking generally—rebuking your attitude of quite unreasoning scepticism. I may say that, having formed a certain opinion of Miss Tripp and her sister, I should examine very carefully any fact they presented for my notice. Foolish women, *mon ami*, are foolish women, whether they are talking about spiritualism or politics or the relation of the sexes or the tenets of the Buddhist faith."

"Yet you listened to what they had to say very carefully."

"That has been my task to-day—to listen. To hear what every one has got to tell me about these seven people—and mainly, of course, the five people primarily concerned. Already we know certain aspects of these people. Take Miss Lawson. From the Misses Tripp we learn she was devoted, unselfish, unworldly and altogether a beautiful character. From Miss Peabody we learn that she was credulous, stupid, without the nerve or the brains to attempt anything criminal. From Dr. Granger we learn that she was downtrodden, that her position was precarious, and that she was a poor 'frightened, fluttering hen,' were, I think, the words he used. From our waiter we learned that Miss Lawson was 'a person,'

and from Ellen that Bob, the dog, despised her! Every one, you see, saw her from a slightly different angle. That is the same with the others. Nobody's opinion of Charles Arundell's morals seems to have been high, but nevertheless they vary in their manner of speaking of him. Dr. Grainger calls him indulgently 'an irreverent young devil.' Miss Peabody says he would murder his grandmother for twopence but clearly prefers a rascal to a 'stick.' Miss Tripp hints not only that he would do a criminal action but that he has done one—or more. These sidelights are all very useful and interesting. They lead to the next thing."

"Which is?"

"To see for ourselves, my friend."

CHAPTER XIII

Theresa Arundell

On the following morning we made our way to the address given us by Dr. Donaldson.

I suggested to Poirot that a visit to the lawyer, Mr. Purvis, might be a good thing, but Poirot negatived the idea strongly.

"No, indeed, my friend. What could we say—what reason could we advance for seeking information?"

"You're usually pretty ready with reasons, Poirot! Any old lie would do, wouldn't it?"

"On the contrary, my friend, 'any old lie,' as you put it, would *not* do. Not with a lawyer. We should be—how do you say it?—thrown out with the flea upon the ear."

"Oh, well," I said. "Don't let us risk *that*!"

So, as I have said, we set out for the flat occupied by Theresa Arundell. It was situated in a block at Chelsea overlooking the river. It was furnished expensively in the modern style, with gleaming chromium and thick rugs with geometric designs upon them.

We were kept waiting a few minutes and then a girl entered the room and looked at us inquiringly.

Theresa Arundell looked about twenty-eight or nine. She was tall and very slender, and she looked rather like an exaggerated drawing in black and white. Her hair was jet black—her face heavily made-up, dead pale. Her eyebrows, freakishly plucked, gave her an air of mocking irony. Her lips were the only spot of colour, a brilliant gash of scarlet in a white face. She also conveyed the impression—how I do not quite know, for her manner was almost wearily indifferent—of being at least twice as much alive as most people. There hung about her the restrained energy of a whiplash.

With an air of cool inquiry she looked from me to Poirot.

Wearied (I hoped) of deceit, Poirot had on this occasion sent in his own card. She was holding it now in her fingers, twirling it to and fro.

"I suppose," she said, "you're M. Poirot?"

Poirot bowed in his best manner.

"At your service, mademoiselle. You permit me to trespass for a few moments of your valuable time?"

With a faint imitation of Poirot's manner, she replied :

"Enchanted, M. Poirot. Pray sit down."

Poirot sat, rather gingerly, on a low square easy-chair. I took an upright one of webbing and chromium. Theresa sat negligently on a low stool in front of the fireplace. She offered us both cigarettes. We refused and she lighted one herself.

"You know my name perhaps, mademoiselle?"

She nodded.

"Little friend of Scotland Yard. That's right, isn't it?"

Poirot, I think, did not much relish this description. He said with some importance :

"I concern myself with problems of crime, mademoiselle."

"How frightfully thrilling," said Theresa Arundell in a bored voice. "And to think I've lost my autograph book!"

"The matter with which I concern myself is this,"

continued Poirot. "Yesterday I received a letter from your aunt."

Her eyes—very long, almond-shaped eyes—opened a little. She puffed smoke in a cloud.

"From my *aunt*, M. Poirot?"

"That is what I said, *mademoiselle*."

She murmured :

"I'm sorry if I'm spoiling sport in any way, but really, you know, there isn't any such person! All my aunts are mercifully dead. The last died two months ago."

"Miss Emily Arundell?"

"Yes, Miss Emily Arundell. You don't receive letters from corpses, do you, M. Poirot?"

"Sometimes I do, *mademoiselle*."

"How *macabre*!"

But there was a new note in her voice—a note suddenly alert and watchful.

"And what did my aunt say, M. Poirot?"

"That, *mademoiselle*, I can hardly tell you just at present. It was, you see, a somewhat"—he coughed—"delicate matter."

There was silence for a minute or two. Theresa Arundell smoked. Then she said :

"It all sounds delightfully hush-hush. But where exactly do I come in?"

"I hoped, *mademoiselle*, that you might consent to answer a few questions."

"Questions? What about?"

"Questions of a family nature."

Again I saw her eyes widen.

"That sounds rather pompous! Supposing you give me a specimen."

"Certainly. Can you tell me the present address of your brother Charles?"

The eyes narrowed again. Her latent energy was less apparent. It was as though she withdrew into a shell.

"I'm afraid I can't. We don't correspond much. I rather think he has left England."

"I see."

Poirot was silent for a minute or two.

"Was that all you wanted to know?"

"Oh, I have other questions. For one—are you satisfied with the way in which your aunt disposed of her fortune? For another—how long have you been engaged to Dr. Donaldson?"

"You do jump about, don't you?"

"*Eh bien?*"

"*Eh bien*—since we are so foreign!—my answer to both those questions is that they are none of your business! *Ça ne vous regarde pas, M. Hercule Poirot.*"

Poirot studied her for a moment or two attentively. Then, with no trace of disappointment, he got up.

"So it is like that! Ah, well, perhaps it is not surprising. Allow me, mademoiselle, to congratulate you upon your French accent. And to wish you a very good morning. Come, Hastings."

We had reached the door when the girl spoke. The simile of a whiplash came again into my mind. She did not move from her position, but the two words were like the flick of a whip.

"Come back!" she said.

Poirot obeyed slowly. He sat down again and looked at her inquiringly.

"Let's stop playing the fool," she said. "It's just possible that you might be useful to me, M. Hercule Poirot."

"Delighted, mademoiselle—and how?"

Between two puffs of cigarette smoke she said very quietly and evenly :

"Tell me how to break that will."

"Surely a lawyer—"

"Yes, a lawyer, perhaps—if I knew the right lawyer. But the only lawyers I know are respectable men! Their advice is that the will holds good in law and that any attempt to contest it will be useless expense."

"But you do not believe them?"

"I believe there is always a way to do things—if you don't mind being unscrupulous and are prepared to pay. Well, *I am prepared to pay.*"

"And you take it for granted that I am prepared to be unscrupulous if I am paid?"

"I've found that to be true of most people! I don't see why you should be an exception. People always protest about their honesty and their rectitude to begin with, of course."

"Just so, that is part of the game, eh? But what, given that I was prepared to be—unscrupulous—do you think I could do?"

"I don't know. But you're a clever man. Every one knows that. You could think out some scheme."

"Such as?"

Theresa Arundell shrugged her shoulders.

"That's your business. Steal the will and substitute a forgery.... Kidnap the Lawson woman and frighten her into saying she bullied Aunt Emily into making it. Produce a later will made on old Emily's deathbed."

"Your fertile imagination takes my breath away, mademoiselle!"

"Well, what is your answer? I've been frank enough. If it's righteous refusal, there's the door."

"It is not righteous refusal—yet—" said Poirot.

Theresa Arundell laughed. She looked at me.

"Your friend," she observed, "looks shocked. Shall we send him out to chase himself round the block?"

Poirot addressed himself to me with some slight irritation.

"Control, I pray of you, your beautiful and upright nature, Hastings. I demand pardon for my friend, mademoiselle. He is, as you have perceived, honest. But he is also faithful. His loyalty to myself is absolute. In any case, let me emphasize this point—" he looked at her very hard—"whatever we are about to do will be strictly within the law."

She raised her eyebrows slightly.

"The law," said Poirot thoughtfully, "has a lot of latitude."

"I see," she smiled faintly. "All right, we'll let that be understood. Do you want to discuss your share of the booty—if there turns out to be any booty?"

"That, also, can be understood. Some nice little pickings—that is all I ask."

"Done," said Theresa.

Poirot leant forward.

"Now listen, mademoiselle, usually—in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred cases, shall we say—I am on the side of the law. The hundredth—well, the hundredth is different. For one thing, it is usually much more lucrative.... But it has to be done very quietly, you understand—very, very quietly. My reputation, it must not suffer. I have to be careful."

Theresa Arundell nodded.

"And I must have *all* the facts of the case! I must have the truth! You comprehend that once one knows the truth it is an easier matter to know just what lies to tell!"

"That seems eminently reasonable."

"Very well then. Now, on what date was this will made?"

"On April 21st."

"And the previous will?"

"Aunt Emily made a will five years ago."

"Its provisions being—?"

"After a legacy to Ellen and one to a former cook, all her property was to be divided between the children of her brother Thomas and the children of her sister Arabella."

"Was this money left in trust?"

"No, it was left to us absolutely."

"Now be careful. Did you all know the provisions of this will?"

"Oh, yes. Charles and I knew—and Bella knew too. Aunt Emily made no secret of it. In fact, if any of us asked for a loan she would usually say, 'You'll have all my money when I'm dead and gone. Be content with that fact.'"

"Would she have refused a loan if there had been a case of illness or any dire necessity?"

"No, I don't think she would," said Theresa slowly.

"But she considered you all had enough to live on?"

"She considered so—yes."

There was bitterness in that voice.

"But you—did not?"

Theresa waited a minute or two before speaking. Then she said :

"My father left us thirty thousand pounds each. The interest on that, safely invested, amounts to about twelve hundred a year. Income-tax takes another wedge off it. A nice little income on which one can manage very prettily. But I—" her voice changed, her slim body straightened, her head went back—all that wonderful aliveness I had sensed in her came to the fore—"but I want something better than that out of life! I want the best! The best food, the best clothes—something with line to it—beauty—not just suitable covering in the prevailing fashion. I want to live and enjoy—to go to the Mediterranean and lie in the warm summer sea—to sit round a table and play with exciting wads of money—to give parties—wild, absurd, extravagant parties—I want everything that's going in this rotten world—and I don't want it some day—I want it now!"

Her voice was wonderfully exciting, warm, exhilarating, intoxicating.

Poirot was studying her intently.

"And you have, I fancy, had it now?"

"Yes, Hercule—I've had it!"

"And how much of the thirty thousand is left?"

She laughed suddenly.

"Two hundred and twenty-one pounds, fourteen and sevenpence. That's the exact balance. So you see, little man, you've got to be paid by results. No results—no fees."

"In that case," said Poirot in a matter-of-fact manner, "there will certainly be results."

"You're a great little man, Hercule. I'm glad we got together."

Poirot went on in a business-like way :

"There are a few things that are actually necessary that I should know. Do you drug?"

"No, never."

"Drink?"

"Quite heavily—but not for the love of it. My crowd

trinks and I drink with them, but I could give it up to-morrow."

"That is very satisfactory."

She laughed.

"I shan't give the show away in my cups, Hercule."

Poirot proceeded :

"Love affairs?"

"Plenty in the past."

"And the present?"

"Only Rex."

"That is Dr. Donaldson?"

"Yes."

"He seems, somehow, very alien from the life you mention."

"Oh, he is."

"And yet you care for him. Why, I wonder?"

"Oh, what are reasons? Why did Juliet fall for Romeo?"

"Well, for one thing, with all due deference to Shakespeare, he happened to be the first man she had seen."

Theresa said slowly : "Rex wasn't the first man I saw—not by a long way." She added in a lower voice, "But I think—I feel—he'll be the last man I'll ever see."

"And he is a poor man, mademoiselle."

She nodded.

"And he, too, needs money?"

"Desperately. Oh, not for the reasons I did. He doesn't want luxury—or beauty—or excitement—or any of these things. He'd wear the same suit until it went into holes—and eat a congealed chop every day for lunch quite happily, and wash in a cracked tin bath. If he had money it would all go on test-tubes and a laboratory, and all the rest of it. He's ambitious. His profession means everything to him. It means more to him than—I do."

"He knew that you would come into money when Miss Arundell died?"

"I told him so. Oh! after we were engaged. He isn't really marrying me for my money if that is what you are getting at."

"You are still engaged?"

"Of course we are."

Poirot did not reply. His silence seemed to disquiet her.

"Of course we are," she repeated sharply. And then she added, "You—have you seen him?"

"I saw him yesterday—at Market Basing."

"Why? What did you say to him?"

"I said nothing. I only asked him for your brother's address."

"Charles?" Her voice was sharp again. "What did you want with Charles?"

"Charles? Who wants Charles?"

It was a new voice—a delightful, man's voice.

A bronzed-faced young man with an agreeable grin strolled into the room.

"Who is talking about me?" he asked. "I heard my name in the hall, but I didn't eavesdrop. They were very particular about eavesdropping at Borstal. Now then, Theresa, my girl, what's all this? Spill the beans."

CHAPTER XIV

Charles Arundell

I must confess that from the moment I set eyes on him I entertained a sneaking liking for Charles Arundell. There was something so debonair and carefree about him. His eyes had an agreeable and humorous twinkle and his grin was one of the most disarming I have ever encountered.

He came across the room and sat down on the arm of one of the massive, upholstered chairs.

"What's it all about, old girl?" he asked.

"This is M. Hercule Poirot, Charles. He is prepared to—er—do some dirty work for us in return for a small consideration."

"I protest," cried Poirot. "Not dirty work—d—"

we say a little harmless deception of some kind—so that the original intention of the testator is carried out? Let us put it that way."

"Put it any way you like," said Charles agreeably. "What made Theresa think of you, I wonder?"

"She did not," said Poirot quickly. "I came here of my own accord."

"Offering your services?"

"Not quite that. I was asking for you. Your sister told me you had gone abroad."

"Theresa," said Charles, "is a very careful sister. She hardly ever makes a mistake. In fact, she's suspicious as the devil."

He smiled at her affectionately, but she did not smile back. She looked worried and thoughtful.

"Surely," said Charles, "we've got things the wrong way round? Isn't M. Poirot famous for tracking down criminals? Surely not for aiding and abetting them?"

"We're not criminals," said Theresa sharply.

"But we're quite willing to be," said Charles affably. "I'd thought of a spot of forgery myself—that's rather my line. I got sent down from Oxford because of a little misunderstanding about a cheque. That was childishly simple, though—merely a question of adding a nought. Then there was another little *fracas* with Aunt Emily and the local bank. Foolish on my part, of course. I ought to have realized the old lady was sharp as needles. However, all these incidents have been very small fry—fivers or tenners—that class. A deathbed will would be admittedly risky. One would have to get hold of the stiff and starched Ellen and—is suborn the word?—anyway, induce her to say she had witnessed it. It would take some doing, I fear. I might even marry her and then she wouldn't be able to give evidence against me afterwards."

He grinned amiably at Poirot.

"I feel sure you've installed a secret dictaphone and Scotland Yard is listening in," he said.

"Your problem interests me," said Poirot with a touch of reproof in his manner. "Naturally I could not connive

at anything against the law. But there are more ways than one—" He stopped significantly.

Charles Arundell shrugged his graceful shoulders.

"I've no doubt there's an equal choice of devious ways inside the law," he said agreeably. "You should know."

"By whom was the will witnessed? I mean the one made on April 21st?"

"Purvis brought down his clerk and the second witness was the gardener."

"It was signed then in Mr. Purvis's presence?"

"It was."

"And Mr. Purvis, I fancy, is a man of the highest respectability?"

"Purvis, Purvis, Charlesworth and once more Purvis are just about as respectable and impeccable as the Bank of England," said Charles.

"He didn't like making the will," said Theresa. "In an ultra-correct fashion I believe he even tried to dissuade Aunt Emily from making it."

Charles said sharply :

"Did he tell you that, Theresa?"

"Yes. I went to see him again yesterday."

"It's no good, my sweet—you ought to realize that. Only piles up the six and eightpences."

Theresa shrugged her shoulders.

Poirot said :

"I will ask of you to give me as much information as you can about the last weeks of Miss Arundell's life. Now, to begin with, I understand that you and your brother and also Dr. Tanios and his wife stayed there for Easter?"

"Yes, we did."

"Did anything happen of significance during that week-end?"

"I don't think so."

"Nothing? But I thought—"

Charles broke in.

"What a self-centred creature you are, Theresa. Nothing of significance happened to you! Wrapped in love's young dream! Let me tell you, M. Poirot,

"Thought I did." Charles avoided her eye.

Poirot asked :

"And what did you say, Mr. Arundell?"

"I?" said Charles airily. "Oh, I just laughed. No good cutting up rough. That's not the way. 'Just as you please, Aunt Emily,' I said. 'Bit of a blow, perhaps, but after all, it's your own money and you can do what you like with it.'"

"And your aunt's reaction to that?"

"Oh, it went down well—very well, indeed. She said, 'Well, I will say you're a sportsman, Charles.' And I said, 'Got to take the rough with the smooth. As a matter of fact, if I've no expectations, what about giving me a tenner now?' And she said I was an impudent boy and actually parted with a fiver."

"You concealed your feelings very cleverly."

"Well, as a matter of fact, I didn't take it very seriously."

"You didn't?"

"No. I thought it was what you might call a gesture on the old bean's part. She wanted to frighten us all. I'd a pretty shrewd suspicion that after a few weeks or perhaps months she'd tear that will up. She was pretty hot on family, Aunt Emily. And, as a matter of fact, I believe that's what she *would* have done if she hadn't died so confoundedly suddenly."

"Ah!" said Poirot. "It is an interesting idea that."

He remained silent for a minute or two, then went on :

"Could any one, Miss Lawson, for instance, have overheard your conversation?"

"Rather. We weren't speaking any too low. As a matter of fact, the Lawson bird was hovering about outside the door when I went out. Been doing a bit of snooping in my opinion."

Poirot turned a thoughtful glance on Theresa.

"And you knew nothing of this?"

Before she could answer, Charles broke in :

"Theresa, old girl, I'm sure I told you—or hinted to you."

There was a queer sort of pause. Charles was looking fixedly at Theresa, and there was an anxiety, a fixity,

about his gaze that seemed out of all proportion to the subject matter.

Theresa said slowly :

"If you had told me—I don't think I could have forgotten, do you, M. Poirot?"

Her long, dark eyes turned to him.

Poirot said slowly :

"No, I don't think you could have forgotten, Miss Arundell."

Then he turned sharply to Charles.

"Let me be quite clear on one point. Did Miss Arundell tell you she was about to alter her will, or did she tell you specifically that she *had* altered it?"

Charles said quickly :

"Oh, she was quite definite. As a matter of fact, she showed me the will."

Poirot leaned forward. His eyes opened wide.

"This is very important. You say that Miss Arundell actually showed you the will?"

Charles gave a sudden schoolboy wriggle—a rather disarming action. Poirot's gravity made him quite uncomfortable.

"Yes," he said. "She showed it to me."

"You can swear definitely to that?"

"Of course I can." Charles looked nervously at Poirot. "I don't see what is so significant about that."

There was a sudden brusque movement from Theresa. She had risen and was standing by the mantelpiece. She quickly lit another cigarette.

"And you, mademoiselle?" Poirot whirled suddenly round on her. "Did your aunt say nothing of importance to you during that week-end?"

"I don't think so. She was—quite amiable. That is, as amiable as she usually was. Lectured me a bit about my way of life and all that. But then, she always did. She seemed perhaps a bit more jumpy than usual."

Poirot said, smiling :

"I suppose, mademoiselle, that you were more taken up with your fiancé?"

Theresa said sharply :

"He wasn't there. He was away, he'd gone to some medical congress."

"You had not seen him then since the Easter week-end? Was that the last time you had seen him?"

"Yes—on the evening before we left he came to dinner."

"You had not—excuse me—had any quarrel with him then?"

"Certainly not."

"I only thought, seeing that he was away on your second visit—"

Charles broke in :

"Ah, but you see, that second week-end was rather unpremeditated. We went down on the spur of the moment."

"Really?"

"Oh, let's have the truth," said Theresa wearily. "You see, Bella and her husband were down the week-end before—fussing over Aunt Emily because of her accident. We thought they might steal a march on us—"

"We thought," said Charles with a grin, "that we'd better show a little concern for Aunt Emily's health, too. Really, though, the old lady was much too sharp to be taken in by the dutiful attention stunt. She knew very well how much it was worth. No fool, Aunt Emily."

Theresa laughed suddenly.

"It's a pretty story, isn't it? All of us with our tongues hanging out for money."

"Was that the case with your cousin and her husband?"

"Oh, yes, Bella's always hard up. Rather pathetic the way she tries to copy all my clothes at about an eighth of the price. Tanios speculated with her money, I believe. They're hard put to it to make both ends meet. They've got two children and want to educate them in England."

"Can you perhaps give me their address?" said Poirot.

"They're staying at the Durham Hotel in Bloomsbury."

"What is she like, your cousin?"

"Bella? Well, she's a dreary woman. Eh, Charles?"

"Oh, definitely a dreary woman. Rather like an ear-

wig. She's a devoted mother. So are earwigs, I believe."

"And her husband?"

"Tanios? Well, he looks a bit odd, but he's really a thoroughly nice fellow. Clever, amusing and a thoroughly good sport."

"You agree, mademoiselle?"

"Well, I must admit I prefer him to Bella. He's a damned clever doctor, I believe. All the same, I wouldn't trust him very far."

"Theresa," said Charles, "doesn't trust anybody."

He put an arm round her.

"She doesn't trust me."

"Any one who trusted you, my sweet, would be mentally deficient," said Theresa kindly.

The brother and sister moved apart and looked at Poirot.

Poirot bowed and moved to the door.

"I am—as you say—on the job! It is difficult, but mademoiselle is right. There is always a way. Ah, by the way, this Miss Lawson, is she the kind that might conceivably lose her head under cross-examination in court?"

Charles and Theresa exchanged glances.

"I should say," said Charles, "that a really bullying K.C. could make her say black was white!"

"That," said Poirot, "may be very useful."

He skipped out of the room and I followed him. In the hall he picked up his hat, moved to the front door, opened it and shut it again quickly with a bang. Then he tiptoed to the door of the sitting-room and unblushingly applied his ear to the crack. At whatever school Poirot was educated, there were clearly no unwritten rules about eavesdropping. I was horrified but powerless. I made urgent signs to Poirot, but he took no notice.

And then, clearly, in Theresa Arundell's deep, vibrant voice, there came two words :

"You fool!"

There was the noise of footsteps along the passage and Poirot quickly seized me by the arm, opened the front door and passed through, closing it noiselessly behind him.

CHAPTER XV

Miss Lawson

"Poirot," I said. "Have we *got* to listen at doors?"

"Calm yourself, my friend. It was only I who listened! It was not you who put your ear to the crack. On the contrary, you stood bolt upright like a soldier."

"But I heard just the same."

"True. Mademoiselle was hardly whispering."

"Because she thought that we had left the flat."

"Yes, we practised a little deception there."

"I don't like that sort of thing."

"Your moral attitude is irreproachable! But let us not repeat ourselves. This conversation has occurred on previous occasions. You are about to say that it is not playing the game. And my reply is that murder is not a game."

"But there is no question of murder here."

"Do not be sure of that."

"The *intention*, yes, perhaps. But after all, murder and *attempted* murder are not the same thing."

"Morally they are exactly the same thing. But what I meant was, are you so sure that it is only *attempted* murder that occupies our attention?"

I stared at him.

"But old Miss Arundell died a perfectly natural death."

"I repeat again—*are you so sure?*"

"Every one says so!"

"Every one? Oh, *là là!*"

"The doctor says so," I pointed out. "Dr. Grainger. He ought to know."

"Yes, he ought to know." Poirot's voice was dissatisfied. "But remember, Hastings, again and again a body is exhumed—and in each case a certificate has been signed in all good faith by the doctor attending the case."

"Yes, but in this case, Miss Arundell died of a long-standing complaint."

"It seems so—yes.

Poirot's voice was still dissatisfied. I looked at him keenly. "Poirot," I said, "I'll begin a sentence with 'Are you sure?' Are you sure you are not being carried away by professional zeal? You *want* it to be murder and so you think it *must* be murder."

The shadow on his brow deepened. He nodded his head slowly.

"It is clever what you say there, Hastings. It is a weak spot on which you put your finger. Murder is my business. I am like a great surgeon who specializes in—say—appendicitis or some rarer operation. A patient comes to him and he regards that patient solely from the standpoint of his own specialized subject. Is there any possible reason for thinking this man suffers from so and so...? Me, I am like that, too. I say to myself always, 'Can this possibly be murder?' And you see, my friend, there is nearly always a possibility."

"I shouldn't say there was much possibility here," I remarked.

"But she died, Hastings! You cannot get away from that fact. She *died*!"

"She was in poor health. She was past seventy. It all seems perfectly natural to me."

"And does it also seem natural to you that Theresa Arundell should call her brother a fool with that degree of intensity?"

"What has that got to do with it?"

"Everything! Tell me, what did you think of that statement of Mr. Charles Arundell's—that his aunt had shown him her new will?"

I looked at Poirot warily.

"What do you make of it?" I asked.

Why should Poirot always be the one to ask the questions?

"I call it very interesting—very interesting indeed. So was Miss Theresa Arundell's reaction to it. Their passage of arms was suggestive—very suggestive."

"H'm," I said in oracular fashion.

"It opens up two distinct lines of inquiry."

"They seem a nice pair of crooks," I remarked. "Ready for anything. The girl's amazingly good-looking. As for young Charles, he's certainly an attractive scoundrel."

Poirot was just hailing a taxi. It drew into the curb and Poirot gave an address to the driver.

"17 Clanroyden Mansions, Bayswater."

"So it's Lawson next," I commented. "And after that—the Tanioses?"

"Quite right, Hastings."

"What rôle are you adopting here?" I inquired as the taxi drew up at Clanroyden Mansions. "The biographer of General Arundell, a prospective tenant of Littlegreen House, or something more subtle still?"

"I shall present myself simply as Hercule Poirot."

"How very disappointing," I gibed.

Poirot merely threw me a glance and paid off the taxi.

No. 17 was on the second floor. A pert-looking maid opened the door and showed us into a room that really struck a ludicrous note after the one we had just left.

Theresa Arundell's flat had been bare to the point of emptiness. Miss Lawson's on the other hand was so crammed with furniture and odds and ends that one could hardly move about without the fear of knocking something over.

The door opened and a rather stout, middle-aged lady came in. Miss Lawson was very much as I had pictured her. She had an eager, rather foolish face, untidy greyish hair and pince-nez perched a little askew on her nose. Her style of conversation was spasmodic and consisted of gasps.

"Good-morning—er—I don't think—"

"Miss Wilhelmina Lawson?"

"Yes—yes—that is my name...."

"My name is Poirot—Hercule Poirot. Yesterday I was looking over Littlegreen House."

"Oh, yes?"

Miss Lawson's mouth fell a little wider open and she made some inefficient dabs at her untidy hair.

"Won't you sit down?" She went on: "Sit here,

won't you? Oh, dear, I'm afraid that table is in your way. I'm just a leetle bit crowded here. So difficult! These flats! Just a teeny bit on the small side. But so central! And I do like being central. Don't you?"

With a gasp she sat down on an uncomfortable-looking Victorian chair and, her pince-nez still awry, leaned forward breathlessly and looked at Poirot hopefully.

"I went to Littlegreen House in the guise of a purchaser," went on Poirot. "But I should like to say at once—this is in the strictest confidence—"

"Oh, yes," breathed Miss Lawson, apparently pleasantly excited.

"The very strictest confidence," continued Poirot, "that I went there with another object.... You may or you may not be aware that shortly before she died Miss Arundell wrote to me—"

He paused and then went on.

"I am a well-known private detective."

A variety of expressions chased themselves over Miss Lawson's slightly flushed countenance. I wondered which one Poirot would single out as relevant to his inquiry. Alarm, excitement, surprise, puzzlement....

"Oh," she said. Then after a pause, "Oh," again. And then, quite unexpectedly, she asked :

"Was it about the money?"

Poirot, even, was slightly taken aback. He said tentatively :

"You mean the money that was—"

"Yes, yes. The money that was taken from the drawer?"

Poirot said quietly :

"Miss Arundell didn't tell you she had written to me on the subject of that money?"

"No, indeed. I had no idea—well, really, I must say I'm very surprised—"

"You thought she should not have mentioned it to any one?"

"I certainly didn't think so. You see, she had a very good idea—"

She stopped again. Poirot was silent.

"She had a very good idea who took it. That is what you would say, is it not?"

Miss Lawson nodded and continued breathlessly :
"And I shouldn't have thought she would have wanted—well, I mean she said—that is, she seemed to feel—"

Again Poirot cut in neatly into the midst of these incoherencies.

"It was a family matter?"

"Exactly."

"But me," said Poirot, "I specialize in family matters. I am, you see, very, very discreet."

Miss Lawson nodded vigorously.

"Oh! of course—that makes a difference. It's not like the *police*."

"No, no. I am not at all like the police. That would not have done at all."

"Oh, no. Dear Miss Arundell was such a *proud* woman. Of course, there had been trouble before with Charles, but it was always hushed up. Once, I believe, he had to go to Australia!"

"Just so," said Poirot. "Now the facts of the case were as follows, were they not? Miss Arundell had a sum of money in a drawer—"

He paused. Miss Lawson hastened to confirm his statement.

"Yes—from the Bank. For the wages, you know, and the books."

"And how much was missing exactly?"

"Four pound notes. No, no, I am wrong, three pound notes and two ten-shilling notes. One must be exact, I know, very exact, in such matters." Miss Lawson looked at him earnestly and absent-mindedly knocked her pince-nez a little further awry. Her rather prominent eyes seemed to goggle at him.

"Thank you, Miss Lawson. I see you have an excellent business sense."

Miss Lawson bridled a little and uttered a deprecatory laugh.

"Miss Arundell suspected, no doubt with reason,

that her nephew Charles was responsible for this theft," went on Poirot.

"Yes."

"Although there was no particular evidence to show who actually took the money?"

"Oh, but it must have been Charles! Mrs. Tanios wouldn't do such a thing, and her husband was quite a stranger and wouldn't have known where the money was kept—neither of them would. And I don't think Theresa Arundell would dream of such a thing. She's got plenty of money and always so beautifully dressed."

"It might have been one of the servants," Poirot suggested.

Miss Lawson seemed horrified by the idea.

"Oh, no, indeed, neither Ellen nor Annie would have dreamed of such a thing. They are both *most* superior women and *absolutely* honest, I am sure."

Poirot waited a minute or two. Then he said :

"I wonder if you can give me any idea—I am sure you can, for if any one possessed Miss Arundell's confidence you did—"

Miss Lawson murmured confusedly :

"Oh, I don't know about that, I'm sure—" But she was clearly flattered.

"I feel that you will be able to help me."

"Oh, I'm sure, if I can—anything I can do—"

Poirot went on :

"This is in confidence—"

A sort of owlish expression appeared on Miss Lawson's face. The magical words "in confidence" seemed to be a kind of Open sesame.

"Have you any idea of the reason which caused Miss Arundell to alter her will?"

"Her will? Oh—her will?"

Miss Lawson seemed slightly taken aback.

Poirot said, watching her closely :

"It is true, is it not, that she made a new will shortly before her death, leaving all her fortune to you?"

"Yes, but I knew nothing about it. Nothing at all."

Miss Lawson was shrill in protest. "It was the *greatest* surprise to me! A *wonderful* surprise, of course! So good of dear Miss Arundell. And she never even gave me a *hint*. Not the smallest hint! I was so taken aback, when Mr. Purvis read it out, I didn't know where to look, or whether to laugh or cry! I assure you, Mr. Poirot, the *shock* of it—the *shock*, you know. The *kindness*—the wonderful kindness of dear Miss Arundell. Of course, I'd hoped, perhaps, for just a little something—perhaps just a teeny, teeny legacy—though of course there was no *reason* she should have left me even that. I'd not been with her so very long. But this—it was like—it was like a fairy story! Even now I can't quite believe in it, if you know what I mean. And sometimes—well, sometimes—I don't feel altogether comfortable about it. I mean—well, I mean—"

She knocked off her pince-nez, picked them up, fumbled with them and went on even more incoherently :

"Sometimes I feel that—well, flesh and blood is flesh and blood after all, and I don't feel quite comfortable at Miss Arundell's leaving all her money away from her family. I mean, it doesn't seem *right*, does it? Not *all* of it. Such a *large* fortune, too! Nobody had any *idea*! But—well—it does make one feel uncomfortable—and every one saying things, you know—and I'm sure I've never been an *ill-natured* woman! I mean I wouldn't have dreamed of influencing Miss Arundell in any way! And it's not as though I could, either. Truth to tell, I was always just a teeny weeny bit afraid of her! She was so *sharp*, you know, so inclined to *jump* on you. And quite rude sometimes! 'Don't be a downright fool,' she'd snap. And really, after all, I had my feelings and sometimes I'd feel quite upset.... And then to find out that all the time she'd really been fond of me—well, it was very wonderful, wasn't it? Only of course, as I say, there's been a lot of *unkindness*, and really in some ways one feels—I mean, well, it does seem a little *hard*, doesn't it, on some people?"

"You mean that you would prefer to relinquish the money?" asked Poirot.

Just for a moment I fancied a flicker of some quite different expression showed itself in Miss Lawson's dull, pale blue eyes. I imagined that, just for a moment, a shrewd, intelligent woman sat there instead of an amiable, foolish one.

She said with a little laugh :

"Well—of course, there is the other side of it too.... I mean there are two sides to every question. What I say is, Miss Arundell meant me to have the money. I mean if I didn't take it I should be going against her *wishes*. And that wouldn't be right either, would it?"

"It is a difficult question," said Poirot, shaking his head.

"Yes, indeed, I have worried over it a great deal. Mrs. Tanios—Bella—she is such a nice woman—and those dear little children! I mean, I feel sure Miss Arundell wouldn't have wanted her to—I feel, you see, that dear Miss Arundell intended me to use my *discretion*. She didn't want to leave any money *outright* to Bella because she was afraid that man would get hold of it."

"What man?"

"Her husband. You know, Mr. Poirot, the poor girl is *quite* under his thumb. She does *anything* he tells her. I dare say she'd *murder* some one if he told her to! And she's afraid of him. I'm quite sure she's afraid of him. I've seen her look simply *terrified* once or twice. Now that isn't right, Mr. Poirot—you can't say that's right."

Poirot did not say so. Instead he inquired :

"What sort of man is Dr. Tanios?"

"Well," said Miss Lawson hesitatingly, "he's a very pleasant man."

She stopped doubtfully.

"But you don't trust him?"

"Well—no, I don't. I don't know," went on Miss Lawson doubtfully, "that I'd trust *any* man very much! Such *dreadful* things one hears! And all their *poor* wives go through! It's really terrible! Of course, Dr. Tanios pretends to be very fond of his wife and he's quite charming to her. His manners are really *delightful*. But

I don't trust foreigners. They're so *artful*! And I'm quite sure dear Miss Arundell didn't want her money to get into *his* hands!"

"It is hard on Miss Theresa Arundell and Mr. Charles Arundell also to be deprived of their inheritance," Poirot suggested.

A spot of colour came into Miss Lawson's face.

"I think Theresa has quite as much money as is good for her!" she said sharply. "She spends hundreds of pounds on her clothes alone. And her underclothing—it's wicked! When one thinks of so many nice, well-bred girls who have to earn their own living—"

Poirot gently completed the sentence.

"You think it would do no harm for her to earn hers for a bit?"

Miss Lawson looked at him solemnly.

"It might do her a lot of *good*," she said. "It might bring her to her senses. Adversity teaches us many things."

Poirot nodded slowly. He was watching her intently.

"And Charles?"

"Charles doesn't deserve a penny," said Miss Lawson sharply. "If Miss Arundell cut him out of her will, it was for a very good cause—after his wicked threats."

"Threats?" Poirot's eyebrows rose.

"Yes, threats."

"What threats? When did he threaten her?"

"Let me see, it was—yes, of course, it was at Easter. Actually on *Easter Sunday*—which made it even worse!"

"What did he say?"

"He asked her for money and she'd refused to give it him! And then he told her that it wasn't wise of her. He said if she kept up that attitude he would—now what was the phrase—a very vulgar American one—oh, yes, he said he would bump her off!"

"He threatened to bump her off?"

"Yes."

"And what did Miss Arundell say?"

"She said: 'I think you'll find, Charles, that I can look after myself.'"

"You were in the room at the time?"

"Not exactly in the room," said Miss Lawson after a momentary pause.

"Quite, quite," said Poirot hastily. "And Charles, what did he say to that?"

"He said : 'Don't be too sure.' "

Poirot said slowly :

"Did Miss Arundell take this threat seriously? "

"Well, I don't know.... She didn't say anything to me about it.... But then she wouldn't do that, anyway."

Poirot said quietly :

"You knew, of course, that Miss Arundell was making a new will?"

"No, no. I've told you, it was a complete surprise. I never dreamt—"

Poirot interrupted.

"You did not know the *contents*. But you knew the *fact*—that there *was* a will being made?"

"Well—I suspected—I mean her sending for the lawyer when she was laid up—"

"Exactly. That was after she had a fall, was it not?"

"Yes, Bob—Bob was the dog—he had left his ball at the top of the stairs—and she tripped over it and fell."

"A nasty accident."

"Oh, yes; why, she might easily have broken her leg or her arm. The doctor said so."

"She might quite easily have been killed."

"Yes, indeed."

Her answer seemed quite natural and frank.

Poirot said, smiling :

"I think I saw Master Bob at Littlegreen House."

"Oh, yes, I expect you did. He's a dear little doggie."

Nothing annoys me more than to hear a sporting terrier called a dear little doggie. No wonder, I thought, that Bob despised Miss Lawson and refused to do anything she told him.

"And he is very intelligent?" went on Poirot.

"Oh, yes, very."

"How upset he'd be if he knew he had nearly killed his mistress."

Miss Lawson did not answer. She merely shook her head and sighed.

Poirot asked :

"Do you think it possible that that fall influenced Miss Arundell to remake her will?"

We were getting perilously near the bone here, I thought, but Miss Lawson seemed to find the question quite natural.

"You know," she said, "I shouldn't wonder if you weren't right. It gave her a *shock*—I'm sure of that. Old people never like to think there's any chance of their dying. But an accident like that makes one *think*. Or perhaps she might have had a *premonition* that her death wasn't far off."

Poirot said casually :

"She was in fairly good health, was she not?"

"Oh, yes. Very well, indeed."

"Her illness must have come on very suddenly?"

"Oh, it did. It was quite a shock. We had had some friends that evening—" Miss Lawson paused.

"Your friends, the Misses Tripp. I have met those ladies. They are quite charming."

Miss Lawson's face flushed with pleasure.

"Yes, aren't they? Such *cultured* women! Such wide interests. And so very *spiritual*! They told you perhaps—about our sittings? I expect you are a sceptic—but indeed, I wish I could tell you the inexpressible joy of getting into touch with those who passed over!"

"I am sure of it. I am sure of it."

"Do you know, Mr. Poirot, my mother has spoken to me—more than once. It is such a joy to know that one's dear ones are still thinking of one and watching over one."

"Yes, yes, I can well understand that," said Poirot gently. "And was Miss Arundell also a believer?"

Miss Lawson's face clouded over a little.

"She was willing to be convinced," she said doubtfully. "But I do not think she always approached the matter in the right frame of mind. She was sceptical and unbelieving—and once or twice her attitude attracted a most *undesirable* type of spirit! There were some very ribald

messages—all due, I am *convinced*, to Miss Arundell's attitude."

"I should think very likely due to Miss Arundell," agreed Poirot.

"But on that last evening—" continued Miss Lawson, "perhaps Isabel and Julia told you?—there were distinct phenomena. Actually the beginning of materialization. Ectoplasm—you know what ectoplasm is, perhaps?"

"Yes, yes, I am acquainted with its nature."

"It proceeds, you know, from the medium's mouth in the form of a *ribbon* and builds itself up into a *form*. Now I am *convinced*, Mr. Poirot, that *unknown to herself* Miss Arundell was a *medium*. On that evening I distinctly saw a *luminous ribbon* issuing from dear Miss Arundell's mouth! Then her head became enveloped in a luminous mist."

"Most interesting!"

"And then, unfortunately, Miss Arundell was suddenly taken ill and we had to break up the *séance*."

"You sent for the doctor—when?"

"First thing the following morning."

"Did he think the matter grave?"

"Well, he sent in a hospital nurse the following evening, but I think he hoped she would pull through."

"The—excuse me—the relatives were not sent for?"

Miss Lawson flushed.

"They were notified as soon as possible—that is to say, when Dr. Grainger pronounced her to be in danger."

"What was the cause of the attack? Something she had eaten?"

"No, I don't think there was anything in particular. Dr. Grainger said she hadn't been quite as careful in diet as she should have been. I think he thought the attack was probably brought on by a chill. The weather had been very treacherous."

"Theresa and Charles Arundell had been down that week-end, had they not?"

Miss Lawson pursed her lips together.

"They had."

"The visit was not a success," Poirot suggested, watching her.

"It was not." She added quite spitefully : "Miss Arundell knew what they'd come for!"

"Which was?" asked Poirot, watching her.

"Money!" snapped Miss Lawson. "And they didn't get it."

"No?" said Poirot.

"And I believe that's what Dr. Tanios was after too," she went on.

"Dr. Tanios. He was not down that same week-end, was he?"

"Yes, he came down on the Sunday. He only stayed about an hour."

"Every one seems to have been after poor Miss Arundell's money," hazarded Poirot.

"I know, it is not very nice to think of, is it?"

"No, indeed," said Poirot. "It must have been a shock to Charles and Theresa Arundell that week-end when they learned that Miss Arundell had definitely disinherited them!"

Miss Lawson stared at him.

Poirot said :

"Is that not so? Did she not specifically inform them of the fact?"

"As to that, I couldn't say. I didn't hear anything about it! There wasn't any *fuss*, or anything, as far as I know. Both Charles and his sister seemed to go away *quite* cheerful."

"Ah! Possibly I have been misinformed. Miss Arundell actually kept her will in the house, did she not?"

Miss Lawson dropped her pince-nez and stooped to pick them up.

"I really couldn't say. No, I think it was with Mr. Purvis."

"Who was the executor?"

"Mr. Purvis was."

"After the death, did he come over and look through her papers?"

"Yes, he did."

Poirot looked at her keenly and asked her an unexpected question.

"Do you like Mr. Purvis?"

Miss Lawson was flustered.

"Like Mr. Purvis? Well, really, that's difficult to say, isn't it? I mean, I'm sure he's a very *clever* man—that is, a clever lawyer, I mean. But rather a brusque *manner*! I mean, it's not very pleasant always to have some one speaking to you as though—well, really, I can't explain what I mean—he was quite civil and yet at the same time almost *rude*, if you know what I mean."

"A difficult situation for you," said Poirot sympathetically.

"Yes, indeed, it was."

Miss Lawson sighed and shook her head.

Poirot rose to his feet.

"Thank you very much, mademoiselle, for all your kindness and help."

Miss Lawson rose too. She sounded slightly flustered.

"I'm sure there's nothing to thank *me* for—nothing at all! So glad if I've been able to do anything—if there's anything more I *can* do—"

Poirot came back from the door. He lowered his voice.

"I think, Miss Lawson, that there is something you ought to be told. Charles and Theresa Arundell are hoping to upset this will."

A sharp flush of colour came into Miss Lawson's cheek.

"They can't do that," she said sharply. "My lawyer says so."

"Ah," said Poirot. "You have consulted a lawyer, then?"

"Certainly. Why shouldn't I?"

"No reason at all. A very wise proceeding. Good-day to you, mademoiselle."

When we emerged from *Clarendon Mansions* into the street Poirot drew a deep breath.

"Hastings, *mon ami*, that woman is either exactly what she seems or else she is a very good actress."

"She doesn't believe Miss Arundell's death was any thing but natural. You can see that," I said.

Poirot did not answer. There are moments when he is conveniently deaf. He hailed a taxi.

"Durham Hotel, Bloomsbury," he told the driver.

CHAPTER XVI

Mrs. Tanios

"Gentleman to see you, madam."

The woman who was sitting writing at one of the tables in the writing-room of the Durham Hotel turned her head and then rose, coming towards us uncertainly.

Mrs. Tanios might have been any age over thirty. She was a tall, thin woman with dark hair, rather prominent light "boiled gooseberry" eyes and a worried face. A fashionable hat was perched on her head at an unfashionable angle and she wore a rather depressed-looking cotton frock.

"I don't think—" she began vaguely.

Poirot bowed.

"I have just come from your cousin, Miss Theresa Arundell."

"Oh! from Theresa? Yes?"

"Perhaps I could have a few minutes' private conversation?"

Mrs. Tanios looked about her rather vacantly. Poirot suggested a leather sofa at the far end of the room.

As we made our way there a high voice squeaked out.

"Mother, where are you going?"

"I shall be just over here. Go on with your letter, darling."

The child, a thin, peaky-looking girl of about seven, settled down again to what was evidently a laborious task. Her tongue showed through her parted lips in the effort of composition.

The far end of the room was quite deserted. Mrs.

Tanios sat down; we did the same. She looked inquiringly at Poirot.

He began :

"It is in reference to the death of your aunt, the late Miss Emily Arundell."

Was I beginning to fancy things, or did a look of alarm spring up suddenly in those pale, prominent eyes.

"Yes?"

"Miss Arundell," said Poirot, "altered her will a very short time before she died. By the new will everything was left to Miss Wilhelmina Lawson. What I want to know, Mrs. Tanios, is whether you will join with your cousins, Miss Theresa and Mr. Charles Arundell, in trying to contest that will?"

"Oh!" Mrs. Tanios drew a deep breath. "But I don't think that's possible, is it? I mean, my husband consulted a lawyer and he seemed to think that it was better not to attempt it."

"Lawyers, madame, are cautious people. Their advice is usually to avoid litigation at all costs—and no doubt they are usually right. But there are times when it pays to take a risk. I am not a lawyer myself and therefore I look at the matter rather differently. Miss Arundell—Miss Theresa Arundell, I mean—is prepared to fight. What about you?"

"I—Oh! I really don't know." She twisted her fingers nervously together. "I should have to consult my husband."

"Certainly, you must consult your husband before anything definite is undertaken. But what are your own feelings in the matter?"

"Well, really, I don't know." Mrs. Tanios looked more worried than ever. "It depends so much on my husband."

"But you *yourself*, what do you think, madame?"

Mrs. Tanios frowned, then she said slowly :

"I don't think I like the idea very much. It seems— it seems rather indecent, doesn't it?"

"Does it, madame?"

"Yes—after all, if Aunt Emily chose to leave her money away from her family, I suppose we must get up and fight."

"You do not feel aggrieved in the matter, then?"

"Oh, yes, I do." A quick flush showed in her cheeks. "I think it was most unfair! *Most* unfair! And so unexpected. It was so unlike Aunt Emily. And so very unfair on the children."

"You think it is very unlike Miss Arundell?"

"I think it was extraordinary of her!"

"Then isn't it possible that she was not acting of her own free will? Don't you think that perhaps she was being unduly influenced?"

Mrs. Tanios frowned again. Then she said almost unwillingly :

"The difficult thing is that I can't see Aunt Emily being influenced by *anybody*! She was such a decided old lady."

Poirot nodded approvingly.

"Yes, what you say is true. And Miss Lawson is hardly what one would describe as a strong character."

"No, she's a nice creature, really—rather foolish, perhaps—but very, very kind. That's partly why I feel—"

"Yes, madame?" said Poirot as she paused.

Mrs. Tanios twisted her fingers nervously again as she answered :

"Well, that it would be mean to try and upset the will. I feel certain that it wasn't in any way Miss Lawson's doing—I'm sure she'd be quite incapable of scheming and intriguing—"

"Again, I agree with you, madame."

"And that's why I feel that to go to law would be—well, would be undignified and spiteful, and besides it would be very expensive, wouldn't it?"

"It would be expensive, yes."

"And probably useless, too. But you must speak to my husband about it. He's got a much better head for business than I have."

Poirot waited a minute or two, then he said :

"What reason do you think lay behind the making of that will?"

A quick colour rose in Mrs. Tanios's cheeks as she murmured : "I haven't the least idea."

"Madame, I have told you I am not a lawyer. But you have not asked me what my profession is."

She looked at him inquiringly.

"I am a detective. And, a short time before she died, Miss Emily Arundell wrote me a letter."

Mrs. Tanios leaned forward; her hands pressed themselves together.

"A letter?" she asked abruptly. "About my husband?"

Poirot watched her for a minute or two, then he said lowly:

"I am afraid I am not at liberty to answer that question."

"Then it was about my husband," Her color rose slightly. "What did she say? I can assure you, Mr.—er—I don't know your name."

"Poirot is my name, Hercule Poirot."

"I can assure you, Mr. Poirot, that if anything was said in that letter against my husband, it was entirely untrue! I know, too, who will have inspired that letter! And that is another reason why I would rather have nothing to do with any action undertaken by Theresa and Charles! Theresa has never told my husband. She has said things! I know she has said things! Anna Emily was prejudiced against my husband because he was not an Englishman, and she may therefore have believed things that Theresa said about him. But they are not true, Mr. Poirot, you can take my word for that!"

"Mother—I've finished my story."

Mrs. Tanios turned quickly. With an affectionate smile she took the letter from him and set it on the table.

"That's very nice, darling, and such a beautiful drawing of the house!"

"What shall I do now, mother?"

"That is your only child, madame?"

"No, I have a little boy also. He is out with his father at the moment."

"They did not accompany you to Littlegreen House on your visits?"

"Oh, yes, sometimes, but you see, my aunt was rather old and children were inclined to worry her. But she was very kind and always sent them out nice presents at Christmas."

"Let me see, when did you last see Miss Emily Arundell?"

"I think it was just about ten days before she died."

"You and your husband and your two cousins were all down there together, were you not?"

"Oh, no, that was the week-end before—at Easter."

"And you and your husband were down there the week-end after Easter as well?"

"Yes."

"And Miss Arundell was in good health and spirits then?"

"Yes, she seemed much as usual."

"She was not ill in bed?"

"She was laid up with a fall she had had, but she came downstairs again while we were there."

"Did she say anything to you about having made a new will?"

"No, nothing at all."

"And her manner to you was quite unchanged?"

A slightly longer pause this time before Mrs. Tanios said : "Yes."

I feel sure that at that moment Poirot and I had the same conviction. Mrs. Tanios was lying!

Poirot paused a minute and then said :

"Perhaps I should explain that when I asked if Miss Arundell's manner to you was unchanged, I was not using the 'you' plural. I referred to *you* personally."

Mrs. Tanios replied quickly :

"Oh! I see. Aunt Emily was very nice to me. She gave me a little pearl and diamond brooch and she sent ten shillings to each of the children."

There was no constraint in her manner and words came freely with a rush.

"And as regards your husband—was there no constraint in her manner to him?"

The constraint had returned. She turned to meet Poirot's eyes as she replied:

"No, of course not—why should there?"

"But since you suggest that your husband, Arundell, might have tried to put her in your mind—"

"She did! I'm sure she did!" She went forward eagerly. "You are quite right. There was a change! Aunt Emily was different in her manner to him. And she behaved very badly. She gave him a special digestive mixture to take with his food, to the trouble of getting it made up. She was very kind but rather stiffly, and she was very kind."

CHAPTER XVII

Dr. Tanios

I must say that my first sight of Dr. Tanios was rather a shock. I had been imbuing him in my mind with all sorts of sinister attributes. I had been picturing to myself a dark bearded foreigner with a swarthy aspect and a sinister cast of countenance.

Instead, I saw a rotund, jolly, brown-haired, brown-eyed man. And though it is true he had a beard, it was a modest brown affair that made him look more like an artist.

He spoke English perfectly. His voice had a pleasant timbre and matched the cheerful good-humour of his face.

"Here we are," he said, smiling to his wife. "Edward has been passionately thrilled by his first ride in the tube. He has always been in buses until to-day."

Edward was not unlike his father in appearance, but both he and his little sister had a definitely foreign-looking appearance and I understood what Miss Peabody had meant when she described them as rather yellow-looking children.

The presence of her husband seemed to make Mrs. Tanios nervous. Stammering a little, she introduced Poirot to him. Me, she ignored.

Dr. Tanios took up the name sharply.

"Poirot? Monsieur Hercule Poirot? But I know that name well! And what brings you to us, M. Poirot?"

"It is the affair of a lady lately deceased. Miss Emily Arundell," replied Poirot.

"My wife's aunt? Yes—what of her?"

Poirot said slowly :

"Certain matters have arisen in connection with her death—"

Mrs. Tanios broke in suddenly :

"No, no, I meant the week-end after that—on the 26th. You were there on the Sunday, I think?"

"Oh, Jacob, were you?" Mrs. Tanios looked at him wide-eyed.

He turned quickly.

"Yes, you remember? I just ran down in the afternoon. I told you about it."

Both Poirot and I were looking at her. Nervously she pushed her hat a little further back on her head.

"Surely you remember, Bella," her husband continued. "What a terrible memory you've got."

"Of course!" she apologized, a thin smile on her face. "It's quite true; I have a shocking memory. And it's nearly two months ago now."

"Miss Theresa Arundell and Mr. Charles Arundell were there then, I believe?" said Poirot.

"They may have been," said Tanios easily. "I didn't see them."

"You were not there very long then?"

"Oh, no—just half an hour or so."

Poirot's inquiring gaze seemed to make him a little uneasy.

"Might as well confess," he said with a twinkle. "I hoped to get a loan—but I didn't get it. I'm afraid my wife's aunt didn't take to me as much as she might. Pity, because I liked her. She was a sporting old lady."

"May I ask you a frank question, Dr. Tanios?"

Was there or was there not a momentary apprehension in Tanios's eye? "Certainly, M. Poirot."

"What is your opinion of Charles and Theresa Arundell?"

The doctor looked slightly relieved.

"Charles and Theresa?" He looked at his wife with an affectionate smile. "Bella, my dear, I don't suppose you mind my being frank about your family?"

She shook her head, smiling faintly.

"Then it's my opinion they're rotten to the core, both of them! Funnily enough I like Charles the best. He's a rogue, but he's a likable rogue. He's no moral sense, but he can't help that. People are born that way."

I'll give you an instance. The old lady had a fall down the stairs when we were staying there. I insisted on coming back the following week-end to see how she was. Miss Lawson did her utmost to prevent us. She didn't succeed, but she was annoyed about it, I could see. The reason was clear. *She wanted the old lady to herself.*"

Again Poirot turned to the wife.

"You agree, madame?"

Her husband did not give her time to answer.

"Bella's too kind-hearted," he said. "You won't get her to impute bad motives to anybody. But I'm quite sure I was right. I'll tell you another thing, M. Poirot. The secret of her ascendancy over old Miss Arundell was spiritualism! That's how it was done, depend upon it!"

"You think so?"

"Sure of it, my dear fellow. I've seen a lot of that sort of thing. It gets hold of people. You'd be amazed! Especially any one of Miss Arundell's age. I'd be prepared to bet that that's how the suggestion came. Some spirit—possibly her dead father—ordered her to alter her will and leave her money to the Lawson woman. She was in bad health—credulous—"

There was a very faint movement from Mrs. Tanios. Poirot turned to her.

"You think it possible—yes?"

"Speak up, Bella," said Dr. Tanios. "Tell us your views."

He looked at her encouragingly. Her quick look back at him was an odd one. She hesitated, then said:

"I know so little about these things. I dare say you're right, Jacob."

"Depend upon it I'm all right, eh, M. Poirot?"

Poirot nodded his head.

"It may be—yes." Then he said, "You were down at Market Basing, I think, the week-end before Miss Arundell's death?"

"We were down at Easter and again the week-end after—that is right."

"No, no, I meant the week-end after that—on the 26th. You were there on the Sunday, I think?"

"Oh, Jacob, were you?" Mrs. Tanios looked at him wide-eyed.

He turned quickly.

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"Then it's my opinion they're rotten to the core, both of them! Funnily enough I like Charles the best. He's a rogue, but he's a likable rogue. He's no moral sense, but he can't help that. People are born that way."

"And Theresa?"

He hesitated.

"I don't know. She's an amazingly attractive young woman. But she's quite ruthless, I should say. She'd murder any one in cold blood if it suited her book. At least that's my fancy. You may have heard, perhaps, that her mother was tried for murder."

"And acquitted," said Poirot.

"As you say 'and acquitted,' " said Tanios quickly. "But all the same, it makes one—wonder sometimes."

"You met the young man to whom she is engaged?"

"Donaldson? Yes, he came to supper one night."

"What do you think of him?"

"A very clever fellow. I fancy he'll go far—if he gets the chance. It takes money to specialize."

"You mean that he is clever in his profession?"

"That is what I mean, yes. A first-class brain." He smiled.

"Not quite a shining light in society yet. A little precise and prim in manner. He and Theresa make a comic pair. The attraction of opposites. She's a social butterfly and he's a recluse."

The two children were bombarding their mother.

"Mother, can't we go in to lunch? I'm so hungry. We'll be late."

Poirot looked at his watch and gave an exclamation.

"A thousand pardons! I delay your lunch hour."

Glancing at her husband, Mrs. Tanios said uncertainly:

"Perhaps we can offer you—"

Poirot said quickly:

"You are most amiable, madame, but I have a luncheon engagement for which I am already late."

He shook hands with both the Tanioses and with the children. I did the same.

We delayed for a minute or two in the hall. Poirot wanted to put through a telephone call. I waited for him by the hall porter's desk. I was standing there when I saw Mrs. Tanios come out into the hall and look searchingly around. She had a hunted, harried look. She saw me and came swiftly across to me.

"Your friend—M. Poirot—I suppose he has gone?"

"No, he is in the telephone box."

"Oh."

"You wanted to speak to him?"

She nodded. Her air of nervousness increased.

Poirot came out of the box at that moment and saw us standing together. He came quickly across to us.

"M. Poirot," she began quickly in a low, hurried voice.

"There is something that I would like to say—that I *must* tell you—"

"Yes, madame."

"It is important—very important. You see—"

She stopped. Dr. Tanios and the two children had just emerged from the writing-room. He came across and joined us.

"Having a few last words with M. Poirot, Bella?"

His tone was good-humoured, the smile on his face pleasantness itself.

"Yes—" She hesitated, then said, "Well, that is really all, M. Poirot. I just wanted you to tell Theresa that we will back her up in anything she decides to do. I quite see that the family *must* stand together."

She nodded brightly to us, then taking her husband's arm she moved off in the direction of the dining-room.

I caught Poirot by the shoulder."

"That wasn't what she started to say, Poirot!"

He shook his head slowly, watching the retreating couple.

"She changed her mind," I went on.

"Yes, *mon ami*, she changed her mind."

"Why?"

"I wish I knew," he murmured.

"She will tell us some other time," I said hopefully.

"I wonder. I rather fear—she may not...."

CHAPTER XVIII

"A Nigger in the Woodpile"

We had lunch at a small restaurant not far away. I was eager to learn what he made of the various members of the Arundell family.

"Well, Poirot?" I asked impatiently.

With a look of reproof Poirot turned his whole attention to the menu. When he had ordered he leaned back in his chair, broke his roll of bread in half and said with a slightly mocking intonation :

"Well, Hastings?"

"What do you think of them now you've seen them all?"

Poirot replied slowly :

"*Ma foi*, I think they are an interesting lot! Really this case is an enchanting study! It is, how do you say, the box of surprises? Look how each time I say, 'I got a letter from Miss Arundell before she died,' something crops up. From Miss Lawson I learn about the missing money. Mrs. Tanios says at once, 'About my husband?' Why about her husband? Why should Miss Arundell write to me, Hercule Poirot, about Dr. Tanios?"

"That woman has something on her mind," I said.

"Yes, she knows something. But *what*? Miss Peabody tells us that Charles Arundell would murder his grandmother for twopence. Miss Lawson says that Mrs. Tanios would murder any one if her husband told her to do so. Dr. Tanios says that Charles and Theresa are rotten to the core, and he hints that their mother was a murderess and says apparently carelessly that Theresa is capable of murdering any one in cold blood.

"They have a pretty opinion of each other, all these people! Dr. Tanios thinks, or says he thinks, that there was undue influence. His wife, before he came in, evidently did *not* think so. She does not want to contest the will at first. Later she veers round. See you, Has-

things—it is a pot that boils and seethes and every now and then a significant fact comes to the surface and can be seen. There is *something* in the depths there—yes, there is *something*! I swear it, by my faith as Hercule Poirot, I swear it!”

I was impressed in spite of myself by his earnestness. After a minute or two I said:

“Perhaps you are right, but it seems so vague—so nebulous.”

“But you agree with me that there is *something*?”

“Yes,” I said hesitatingly. “I believe I do.”

Poirot leaned across the table. His eyes bored into mine.

“Yes—you have changed. You are no longer amused, superior—indulging me in my academic pleasures. But what is it that has convinced you? It is not my excellent reasoning—*non, ce n'est pas ça!* But *something*—something quite independent—has produced an effect on you. Tell me, my friend, what it is that has suddenly induced you to take this matter seriously?”

“I think,” I said slowly, “it was Mrs. Tanios. She looked—she looked—*afraid....*”

“Afraid of me?”

“No—no, not of you. It was something else. She spoke so quietly and sensibly to begin with—a natural resentment at the terms of the will, perhaps, but otherwise she seemed so resigned and willing to leave things as they are. It seemed the natural attitude of a well-bred but rather apathetic woman. And then that sudden change—the eagerness with which she came over to Dr. Tanios’s point of view. The way she came out into the hall after us—the—almost *furtive* way—”

Poirot nodded encouragingly.

“And another little thing which you may not have noticed—”

“I notice everything!”

“I mean the point about her husband’s visit to Little-green House on that last Sunday. I could swear she knew nothing of it—that it was the most complete surprise to her—and yet she took her cue so quickly—agreed that

he had told her about it and that she had forgotten. I—I didn't like it, Poirot."

"You are quite right, Hastings—it was significant—that."

"It left an ugly impression of—of fear on me."

Poirot nodded his head slowly.

"You felt the same?" I asked.

"Yes—that impression was very definitely in the air." He paused and then went on: "And yet you liked Tanios, did you not? You found him an agreeable man, open-hearted, good-natured, genial. Attractive in spite of your insular prejudice against the Argentines, the Portuguese and the Greeks—a thoroughly congenial personality?"

"Yes," I admitted. "I did."

In the silence that ensued, I watched Poirot. Presently I said: "What are you thinking of, Poirot?"

"I am reflecting on various people, handsome young Norman Gale, bluff, hearty Evelyn Howard, the pleasant Dr. Sheppard, the quiet, reliable Knighton."

For a moment I did not understand these references to people who had figured in past cases.

"What of them?" I asked.

"They were all delightful personalities...."

"My goodness, Poirot, do you really think Tanios—"

"No, no. Do not jump to conclusions, Hastings. I am only pointing out that one's own personal reactions to people are singularly unsafe guides. One must go not by one's feelings but by facts."

"H'm," I said. "Facts are not our strong suit. No, no, Poirot, don't go over it all again!"

"I will be brief, my friend, do not fear. To begin with, we have quite certainly a case of attempted murder. You admit that, do you not?"

"Yes," I said slowly. "I do."

I had, up to now, been a little sceptical over Poirot's (as I thought) somewhat fanciful reconstruction of the events on the night of Easter Tuesday. I was forced to admit, however, that his deductions were perfectly logical.

"*Très bien.* Now one cannot have attempted murder without a murderer. One of the people present on that evening was a murderer—in intention if not in fact."

"Granted."

"Then that is our starting point—a murderer. We make a few inquiries—we, as you would say, stir the mud—and what do we get—several very interesting accusations uttered apparently casually in the course of conversations."

"You think they were not casual?"

"Impossible to tell at the moment! Miss Lawson's innocent seeming way of bringing out the fact that Charles threatened his aunt may have been quite innocent or it may not. Dr. Tanios's remarks about Theresa Arundell may have absolutely no malice behind them, but be merely a physician's genuine opinion. Miss Peabody, on the other hand, is probably quite genuine in her opinion of Charles Arundell's proclivities—but it is, after all, merely an opinion. So it goes on. There is a saying, is there not, a nigger in the woodpile. *Eh bien*, that is just what I find here. There is—not a nigger—but a murderer in our woodpile."

"What I'd like to know is what you yourself really think, Poirot."

"Hastings—Hastings—I do not permit myself to 'think'—not, that is, in the sense that you are using the word. At the moment I only make certain reflections."

"Such as?"

"I consider the questions of motive. What are the likely *motives* for Miss Arundell's death? Clearly the most obvious one is *gain*. Who would have gained by Miss Arundell's death—if she had died on Easter Tuesday?"

"Every one—with the exception of Miss Lawson."

"Precisely."

"Well, at any rate, one person is automatically cleared."

"Yes," said Poirot thoughtfully. "It would seem so. But the interesting thing is that the person who would have gained nothing if death had occurred on Easter Tuesday gains everything when death occurs two weeks later."

"What are you getting at, Poirot?" I said, slightly puzzled.

"Cause and effect, my friend, cause and effect."

I looked at him doubtfully.

He went on :

"Proceed logically! What exactly happened—after the accident?"

I hate Poirot in this mood. Whatever one says is bound to be wrong! I proceeded with intense caution.

"Miss Arundell was laid up in bed."

"Exactly. With plenty of time to think. What next?"

"She wrote to you."

Poirot nodded.

"Yes, she wrote to me. And the letter was not posted. A thousand pities, that."

"Do you suspect that there was something fishy about that letter not being posted?"

Poirot frowned.

"There, Hastings, I have to confess that I do not know. I think—in view of everything I am almost sure—that the letter was genuinely mislaid. I believe—but I cannot be sure—that the fact that such a letter was written was unsuspected by anybody. Continue—what happened next?"

I reflected.

"The lawyer's visit," I suggested.

"Yes—she sent for her lawyer and in due course he arrived."

"And she made a new will," I continued.

"Precisely. She made a new and very unexpected will. Now, in view of that will we have to consider very carefully a statement made to us by Ellen. Ellen said, if you remember, that Miss Lawson was particularly anxious that the news that Bob had been out all night should not get to Miss Arundell's ears."

"But—oh, I see—no, I don't. Or do I begin to see what you are hinting at?...."

"I doubt it!" said Poirot. "But if you do, you realize, I hope, the *supreme importance* of that statement."

He fixed me with a fierce eye.

"Of course. Of course," I said hurriedly.
"And then," continued Poirot, "various other things happen. Charles and Theresa come for the week-end, and Miss Arundell shows the new will to Charles—er—so he says."

"Don't you believe him?"

"I only believe statements that are *checked*. Miss Arundell does not show it to Theresa."

"Because she thought Charles would tell her."

"But he doesn't. *Why* doesn't he?"

"According to Charles himself he *did* tell her."

"Theresa said quite positively that he *didn't*—a very interesting and suggestive little clash. And when we depart she calls him a fool."

"I'm getting fogged, Poirot," I said plaintively.

"Let us return to the sequence of events. Dr. Tanios comes down on Sunday—possibly without the knowledge of his wife."

"I should say certainly without her knowledge."

"Let us say *probably*. To proceed! Charles and Theresa leave on the Monday. Miss Arundell is in good health and spirits. She eats a good dinner and sits in the dark with the Tripps and Miss Lawson. Towards the end of the *séance* she is taken ill. She retires to bed and dies four days later and Miss Lawson inherits all her money, and Captain Hastings says she died a natural death!"

"Whereas Hercule Poirot says she was given poison in her dinner on no evidence at all!"

"I have *some* evidence, Hastings. Think over our conversation with the Misses Tripp. And also one statement that stood out from Miss Lawson's somewhat rambling conversation."

"Do you mean the fact that she had curry for dinner? Curry would mask the taste of a drug. Is that what you meant?"

Poirot said slowly :

"Yes, the curry has a certain significance, perhaps."

"But," I said, "if what you advance (in defiance of all the medical evidence) is true, only Miss Lawson or one of the maids could have killed her."

"I wonder."

"Or the Tripp women? Nonsense. I can't believe that! All these people are palpably innocent."

Poirot shrugged his shoulders.

"Remember this, Hastings, stupidity—or even silliness, for that matter—can go hand in hand with intense cunning. And do not forget the original attempt at murder. That was not the handiwork of a particularly clever or complex brain. It was a very *simple* little murder, suggested by Bob and his habit of leaving the ball at the top of the stairs. The thought of putting a thread across the stairs was quite simple and easy—a child could have thought of it!"

I frowned.

"You mean—"

"I mean that what we are seeking to find here is just one thing—the wish to kill. Nothing more than that."

"But the poison must have been a very skilful one to leave no trace," I argued. "Something that the ordinary person would have difficulty in getting hold of. Oh, damn it all, Poirot, I simply can't believe it now. You can't *know*! It's all pure hypothesis."

"You are wrong, my friend. As the result of our various conversations this morning I have now something definite to go upon. Certain faint but unmistakable indications. The only thing is—I am afraid."

"Afraid? Of what?"

He said gravely :

"Of disturbing the dogs that sleep. That is one of your proverbs, is it not? To let the sleeping dogs lie! That is what our murderer does at present—sleeps happily in the sun.... Do we not know, you and I, Hastings, how often a murderer, his confidence disturbed, turns and kills a second—or even a *third* time!"

"You are afraid of that happening?"

He nodded.

"Yes. *If* there is a murderer in the woodpile—and I think there is, Hastings. Yes, I think there is...."

CHAPTER XIX

Visit to Mr. Purvis

Poirot called for his bill and paid it.

"What do we do next?" I asked.

"We are going to do what you suggested this morning. We are going to Harchester to interview Mr. Purvis. That is why I telephoned from the Durham Hotel."

"You telephoned to Purvis?"

"No, to Theresa Arundell. I asked her to write me a letter of introduction to him. To approach him with any chance of success we must be accredited by the family. She promised to send it round to my flat by hand. It should be awaiting us there now."

We found not only the letter but Charles Arundell, who had brought it round in person.

"Nice place you have here, M. Poirot," he remarked, glancing round the sitting-room of the flat.

At that moment my eye was caught by an imperfectly shut drawer in the desk. A small slip of paper was preventing it from shutting.

Now if there was one thing absolutely incredible it was that Poirot would shut a drawer in such a fashion! I looked thoughtfully at Charles. He had been alone in this room awaiting our arrival. I had no doubt that he had been passing the time by snooping among Poirot's papers. What a young crook the fellow was! I felt myself burning with indignation.

Charles himself was in a most cheerful mood.

"Here we are," he remarked, presenting a letter. "All present and correct—and I hope you'll have more luck with old Purvis than we did."

"He held out very little hope, I suppose?"

"Definitely discouraging.... In his opinion the Lawson bird had clearly got away with the doings."

"You and your sister have never considered an appeal to the lady's feelings?"

Charles grinned.

"I considered it—yes. But there seemed to be nothing doing. My eloquence was in vain. The pathetic picture of the disinherited black sheep—and a sheep not so black as he was painted (or so I endeavoured to suggest)—failed to move the woman! You know, she definitely seems to dislike me! I don't know why." He laughed. "Most old women fall for me quite easily. They think I've never been properly understood and that I've never had a fair chance!"

"A useful point of view."

"Oh, it's been extremely useful before now. But, as I say, with the Lawson bird, nothing doing. I think she's rather anti-man. Probably used to chain herself to railings and wave a suffragette flag in good old pre-war days."

"Ah, well," said Poirot, shaking his head. "If simpler methods fail—"

"We must take to crime," said Charles cheerfully.

"Aha," said Poirot. "Now, speaking of crime, young man, is it true that you threatened your aunt—that you said that you would 'bump her off,' or words to that effect?"

Charles sat down in a chair, stretched his legs out in front of him and stared hard at Poirot.

"Now who told you that?" he said.

"No matter. Is it true?"

"Well, there are elements of truth about it."

"Come, come, let me hear the true story—the *true* story, mind."

"Oh, you can have it, sir. There was nothing melodramatic about it. I'd been attempting a touch—if you gather what I mean."

"I comprehend."

"Well, that didn't go according to plan. Aunt Emily intimated that any efforts to separate her and her money would be quite unavailing! Well, I didn't lose my temper, but I put it to her plainly. 'Now look here, Aunt Emily,' I said, 'you know, you're going about things in such a way that you'll end by getting bumped off!'

She said, rather sniffily, what did I mean. "The fact?" I said. "Here are your friends and relatives all hanging around with their mouths open, all as poor as church mice—whatever church mice may be—all hanging. And what do you do? Sit down on the dais and refuse to part. That's the way people get themselves murdered. Take it from me, if you're bumped off, you'll only have yourself to blame."

"She looked at me then, over the top of her spectacles in a way she had. Looked at me rather nastily. 'Oh,' she said drily enough, 'so that's your opinion, is it?' 'It is,' I said. 'You loosen up a bit, that's my advice to you.' 'Thank you, Charles,' she said, 'for your well-meant advice. But I think you'll find I'm well able to take care of myself.' 'Please yourself, Aunt Emily,' I said. I was grinning all over my face—and I fancy she wasn't as grim as she tried to look. 'Don't say I didn't warn you.' 'I'll remember it,' she said."

He paused.

"That's all there was to it."

"And so," said Poirot, "you contented yourself with a few pound notes you found in a drawer."

Charles stared at him, then burst out laughing.

"I take off my hat to you," he said. "You're some sleuth! How did you get hold of *that*?"

"It is true, then?"

"Oh, it's true enough! I was damned hard up. Had to get money somehow. Found a nice little wad of notes in a drawer and helped myself to a few. I was very modest—didn't think my little subtraction would be noticed. Even then, they'd probably think it was the servants."

Poirot said drily:

"It would be very serious for the servants if such an idea had been entertained."

Charles shrugged his shoulders.

"Every one for himself," he murmured.

"And *le diable* takes the hindermost," said Poirot. "That is your creed, is it?"

Charles was looking at him curiously.

"I didn't know the old lady had a

did you come to know about it—and about the bumping-off conversation?"

"Miss Lawson told me."

"The sly old pussy cat!" He looked, I thought, just a shade disturbed. "She doesn't like me and she doesn't like Theresa," he said presently. "You don't think—she's got anything more up her sleeve?"

"What could she have?"

"Oh, I don't know. It's just that she strikes me as a malicious old devil." He paused. "She hates Theresa..." he added.

"Did you know, Mr. Arundell, that Dr. Tanios came down to see your aunt on the Sunday before she died?"

"What—on the Sunday that we were there?"

"Yes. You did not see him?"

"No. We were out for a walk in the afternoon. I suppose he must have come then. Funny that Aunt Emily didn't mention his visit. Who told you?"

"Miss Lawson."

"Lawson again? She seems to be a mine of information."

He paused and then said: "You know, Tanios is a nice fellow. I like him. Such a jolly, smiling chap."

"He has an attractive personality, yes," said Poirot. Charles rose to his feet.

"If I'd been him I'd have murdered the dreary Bella years ago! Doesn't she strike you as the type of woman who is marked out by fate to be a victim? You know, I should never be surprised if bits of her turned up in a trunk at Margate or somewhere!"

"It is not a pretty action that you attribute there to her husband the good doctor," said Poirot severely.

"No," said Charles meditatively. "And I don't think really that Tanios would hurt a fly. He's much too kind-hearted."

"And what about you? Would you do murder if it were made worth your while?"

Charles laughed—a ringing, genuine laugh.

"Thinking about a spot of blackmail, M. Poirot? Nothing doing. I can assure you that I didn't put"—he

stopped suddenly and then went on—"strychnine in Aunt Emily's soup."

With a careless wave of his hand he departed.

"Were you trying to frighten him, Poirot?" I asked. "If so, I don't think you succeeded. He showed no guilty reactions whatsoever."

"No?"

"No. He seemed quite unruffled."

"Curious that pause he made," said Poirot.

"A pause?"

"Yes. A pause before the word 'strychnine.' Almost as though he had been about to say something else and thought better of it."

I shrugged my shoulders.

"He was probably thinking of a good, venomous-sounding poison."

"It is possible. It is possible. But let us set off. We will, I think, stay the night at The George in Market Basing."

Ten minutes later saw us speeding through London, bound once more for the country.

We arrived in Harehester about four o'clock and made our way straight to the offices of Purvis, Purvis, Charlesworth and Purvis.

Mr. Purvis was a big, solidly built man with white hair and a rosy complexion. He had a little the look of a country squire. His manner was courteous but reserved.

He read the letter we had brought and then looked at us across the top of his desk. It was a shrewd look and a somewhat searching one.

"I know you by name, of course, M. Poirot," he said politely. "Miss Arundell and her brother have, I gather, engaged your services in this matter, but exactly in what capacity you propose to be of use to them I am at a loss to imagine."

"Shall we say, Mr. Purvis, a fuller investigation of all the circumstances?"

The lawyer said drily: "Miss Arundell and her

brother have already had my opinion as to the legal position. The circumstances were perfectly clear and admit of no misrepresentation."

"Perfectly, perfectly," said Poirot quickly. "But you will not, I am sure, object to just repeating them so that I can envisage the situation clearly."

The lawyer bowed his head.

"I am at your service."

Poirot began :

"Miss Arundell wrote to you giving you instructions on the seventeenth of April, I believe?"

Mr. Purvis consulted some papers on the table before him.

"Yes, that is correct."

"Can you tell me what she said?"

"She asked me to draw up a will. There were to be legacies to two servants and to three or four charities. The rest of her estate was to pass to Wilhelmina Lawson absolutely."

"You will pardon me, Mr. Purvis, but you were surprised?"

"I will admit that—yes, I was surprised."

"Miss Arundell had made a will previously?"

"Yes, she had made a will five years ago."

"That will, after certain small legacies, left her property to her nephew and nieces?"

"The bulk of her estate was to be divided equally between the children of her brother Thomas and the daughter of Arabella Biggs, her sister."

"What has happened to that will?"

"At Miss Arundell's request I brought it with me when I visited her at Littlegreen House on April 21st."

"I should be much obliged to you, Mr. Purvis, if you would give me a full description of everything that occurred on that occasion."

The lawyer paused for a minute or two. Then he said, very precisely :

"I arrived at Littlegreen House at three o'clock in the afternoon. One of my clerks accompanied me. Miss Arundell received me in the drawing-room."

"How did she look to you?"

"She seemed to me in good health in spite of the fact that she was walking with a stick. That, I understand, was on account of a fall she had recently. Her general health, as I say, seemed good. She struck me as slightly nervous and over-excited in manner."

"Was Miss Lawson with her?"

"She was with her when I arrived. But she left us immediately."

"And then?"

"Miss Arundell asked me if I had done what she had asked me to do, and if I had brought the new will with me for her to sign.

"I said I had done so. I—er—" He hesitated for a minute or two, then went on stiffly: "I may as well say that, as far as it was proper for me to do so, I remonstrated with Miss Arundell. I pointed out to her that this new will might be regarded as grossly unfair to her family who were, after all, her own flesh and blood."

"And her answer?"

"She asked me if the money was or was not her own to do with as she liked. I replied that certainly that was the case. 'Very well then,' she said. I reminded her that she had known this Miss Lawson a very short time, and I asked her if she was quite sure that the injustice she was doing to her own family was legitimate. Her reply was, 'My dear friend, I know perfectly what I am doing.'"

"Her manner was excited, you say."

"I think I can definitely say that it was, but understand me, M. Poirot, she was in full possession of her faculties. She was in every sense of the word fully competent to manage her own affairs. Though my sympathies are entirely with Miss Arundell's family, I should be obliged to maintain that in any court of law."

"That is quite understood. Proceed. I pray of you."

"Miss Arundell read through her existing will. Then she stretched out her hand for the one I had had drawn up. I may say that I would have preferred to submit a draft first, but she had impressed upon me that the will

must be brought her ready to sign. That presented no difficulties as its provisions were so simple. She read it through, nodded her head, and said she would sign it straightaway. I felt it my duty to enter one last protest. She heard me out quite patiently, but said that her mind was quite made up. I called in my clerk and he and the gardener acted as witnesses to her signature. The servants, of course, were ineligible owing to the fact that they were beneficiaries under the will."

"And afterwards, did she entrust the will to you for safe-keeping?"

"No, she placed it in a drawer of her desk, which drawer she locked."

"What was done with the original will? Did she destroy it?"

"No, she locked it away with the other."

"After her death, where was the will found?"

"In that same drawer. As executor I had her keys and went through her papers and business documents."

"Were both wills in the drawer?"

"Yes, exactly as she had placed them there."

"Did you question her at all as to the motive for this rather surprising action?"

"I did. But I got no satisfactory answer. She merely assured me that 'she knew what she was doing.'"

"Nevertheless you were surprised at the proceeding?"

"Very surprised. Miss Arundell, I should say, had always shown herself to have a strong sense of family feeling."

Poirot was silent a minute, then he asked :

"You did not, I suppose, have any conversation with Miss Lawson on the subject?"

"Certainly not. Such a proceeding would have been highly improper."

Mr. Purvis looked scandalized at the mere suggestion.

"Did Miss Arundell say anything to indicate that Miss Lawson knew that a will was being drawn in her favour?"

"On the contrary. I asked her if Miss Lawson was aware of what was being done, and Miss Arundell snapped out that she knew nothing about it."

"It was advisable, I thought, that Miss Lawson should not be aware of what had happened. I endeavoured to hint as much and Miss Arundell seemed quite of my opinion."

"Just why did you stress that point, Mr. Purvis?"

The old gentleman returned his glance with dignity.

"Such things, in my opinion, are best undiscussed. Also it might have led to future disappointment."

"Ah!" Poirot drew a long breath. "I take it that *you* thought it probable that Miss Arundell might change her mind in the near future?"

The lawyer bowed his head.

"That is so. I fancied that Miss Arundell had had some violent altercation with her family. I thought it probable that when she cooled down she would repent of her rash decision."

"In which case she would have done—what?"

"She would have given me instructions to prepare a new will."

"She might have taken the simpler course of merely destroying the will lately made, in which case the older will would have been good?"

"That is a somewhat debatable point. All earlier wills, you understand, had been definitely revoked by the testator."

"But Miss Arundell would not have had the legal knowledge to appreciate that point. She may have thought that by destroying the later will, the earlier one would stand."

"It is quite possible."

"Actually, if she died intestate, her money would pass to her family?"

"Yes. One half to Mrs. Tanios, one half divisible between Charles and Theresa Arundell. But the fact remains, however, that she did *not* change her mind! She died with her decision unchanged."

"But that," said Poirot, "is where I come in."

The lawyer looked at him inquiringly.

Poirot leaned forward.

"Supposing," he said, "that Miss Arundell, on her

deathbed, *wished to destroy that will*. Supposing that she believed that she *had* destroyed it—but that, in reality, she only destroyed the *first* will."

Mr. Purvis shook his head.

"No, *both* wills were intact."

"Then supposing she destroyed a *dummy* will—*under the impression that she was destroying the genuine document*. She was very ill, remember; it would be easy to deceive her."

"You would have to bring evidence to that effect," said the lawyer sharply.

"Oh, undoubtedly—undoubtedly...."

"Is there—may I ask—is there any reason to believe something of the kind happened?"

Poirot drew back a little.

"I should not like to commit myself at this stage—"

"Naturally, naturally," said Mr. Purvis, agreeing with a phrase that was familiar to him.

"But I may say, strictly in confidence, that there are some curious features about this business!"

"Really? You don't say so?"

Mr. Purvis rubbed his hands together with a kind of pleasurable anticipation.

"What I wanted from you and what I have got," continued Poirot, "is your opinion that Miss Arundell would, sooner or later, have changed her mind and relented towards her family."

"That is only my personal opinion, of course," the lawyer pointed out.

"My dear sir, I quite understand. You do not, I believe, act for Miss Lawson?"

"I advised Miss Lawson to consult an independent solicitor," said Mr. Purvis.

His tone was wooden.

Poirot shook hands with him, thanking him for his kindness and the information he had given us.

CHAPTER XX

Second Visit to Littlegreen House

On our way from Harchester to Market Basing, a matter of some ten miles, we discussed the situation.

"Have you any grounds at all, Poirot, for that suggestion you threw out?"

"You mean that Miss Arundell may have believed that that particular will was destroyed? No, *mon ami*—frankly, no. But it was incumbent upon me—you must perceive that—to make *some* sort of suggestion! Mr. Purvis is a shrewd man. Unless I threw out some hint of the kind I did, he would ask himself what I could be doing in this affair."

"Do you know what you remind me of, Poirot?"

"No, *mon ami*."

"Of a juggler juggling with a lot of different-coloured balls! They are all in the air at once."

"The different-coloured balls are the different lies I tell—eh?"

"That's about the size of it."

"And some day, you think, there will come the grand crash?"

"You can't keep it up for ever," I pointed out.

"That is true. There will come the grand moment when I catch the balls one by one, make my bow, and walk off the stage."

"To the sound of thunderous applause from the audience."

Poirot looked at me rather suspiciously.

"That well may be, yes."

"We didn't learn very much from Mr. Purvis," I remarked, edging away from the danger-point.

"No, except that it confirmed our general ideas."

"And it confirmed Miss Lawson's statement that she knew nothing about the will until after the old lady's death."

"Me, I do not see that it confirmed anything of the sort."

"Purvis advised Miss Arundell not to tell her, and Miss Arundell replied that she had no intention of doing so."

"Yes, that is all very nice and clear. But there are keyholes, my friend, and keys that unlock locked drawers."

"Do you really think that Miss Lawson would eavesdrop and poke and pry around?" I asked, rather shocked. Poirot smiled.

"Miss Lawson—she is not an old school tie, *mon cher*. We know that she overheard *one* conversation which she was not supposed to have heard—I refer to the one in which Charles and his aunt discussed the question of bumping off miserly relatives."

I admitted the truth of that.

"So you see, Hastings, she may easily have overheard some of the conversation between Mr. Purvis and Miss Arundell. He has a good, resonant voice.

"As for poking and prying," went on Poirot, "more people do it than you would suppose. Timid and easily frightened people such as Miss Lawson often acquire a number of mildly dishonourable habits which are a great solace and recreation to them."

"Really, Poirot!" I protested.

He nodded his head a good many times.

"But yes, it is so, it is so."

We arrived at The George and took a couple of rooms. Then we strolled off in the direction of Littlegreen House.

When we rang the bell, Bob immediately answered the challenge. Dashing across the hall, barking furiously, he flung himself against the front door.

"I'll have your liver and your lights!" he snarled. "I'll tear you limb from limb! I'll teach you to try and get into *this* house! Just wait until I get my teeth into you."

A soothing murmur added itself to the clamour.

"Now then, boy. Now then, there's a good doggie. Come in here."

Bob, dragged by the collar, was immured in the morning-room much against his will.

"Always spoiling a fellow's sport," he grumbled. "First chance I've had of giving any one a really good fright for ever so long. Just aching to get my teeth into a trouser leg. You be careful of yourself without me to protect you."

The door of the morning-room was shut on him, and Ellen drew back bolts and bars and opened the front door.

"Oh, it's you, sir," she exclaimed.

She drew the door right back. A look of highly pleasurable excitement spread over her face.

"Come in, sir, if you please, sir."

We entered the hall. From beneath the door on the left, loud snuffling sounds proceeded, interspersed with growls. Bob was endeavouring to "place" us correctly.

"You can let him out," I suggested.

"I will, sir. He's quite all right, really, but he makes such a noise and rushes at people so it frightens them. He's a splendid watchdog though."

She opened the morning-room door, and Bob shot through like a suddenly projected cannon-ball.

"Who is it? Where are they? Oh, there you are. Dear me, don't I seem to remember—" Sniff—sniff—sniff—prolonged snort. "Of course! We *have* met!"

"Hullo, old man," I said. "How goes it?"

Bob wagged his tail perfunctorily.

"Nicely, thank you. Let me just see—" He resumed his researches. "Been talking to a spaniel lately, I smell. Foolish dogs, I think. What's this? A cat? That is interesting. Wish we had her there. We'd have a rare sport. H'm—not a bad bull-terrier."

Having correctly diagnosed a visit I had lately paid to some doggy friends, he transferred his attentions to Poirot, inhaled a noseful of benzine and walked away reproachfully.

"Bob," I called.

He threw me a look over his shoulder.

"It's all right. I know what I'm doing. I'll be back in a jiffy."

"The house is all shut up. I hope you'll excuse—" Ellen hurried into the morning-room and began to unfasten the shutters.

"Excellent, this is excellent," said Poirot, following her in and sitting down. As I was about to join him, Bob reappeared from some mysterious region, ball in mouth. He dashed up the stairs and sprawled himself on the top step, his ball between his paws. His tail wagged slowly.

"Come on," he said. "Come on. Let's have a game."

My interest in detection momentarily eclipsed, we played for some minutes, then with a feeling of guilt I hurried into the morning-room.

Poirot and Ellen seemed to be well away on the subject of illness and medicines.

"Some little white pills, sir, that's all she used to take. Two or three after every meal. That was Dr. Grainger's orders. Oh, yes, she was very good about it. Tiny little things they were. And then there was some stuff Miss Lawson swore by. Capsules, they were, Dr. Loughbarrow's Liver Capsules. You can see advertisements of them on all the hoardings."

"She took those too?"

"Yes. Miss Lawson got her them to begin with, and she thought they did her good."

"Did Dr. Grainger know?"

"Oh, sir, he didn't mind. 'You take 'em if you think they do you good,' he'd say to her. And she said, 'Well, you may laugh, but they *do* do me good. A lot better than any of *your* physic.' And Dr. Grainger, he laughed, and said faith was worth all the drugs ever invented."

"She didn't take anything else?"

"No. Miss Bella's husband, the foreign doctor, he went out and got her a bottle of something, but although she thanked him very politely she poured it away and that I know for a fact! And I think she was right. You don't know where you are with these foreign things."

"Mrs. Tanios saw her pouring it away, didn't she?"

"Yes, and I'm afraid she was rather poor poor lady. I'm sorry, too, for no doubt it was really meant on the doctor's part."

"No doubt. No doubt. I suppose any medicines that were left in the house were thrown away when Miss Arundell died?"

Ellen looked a little surprised at the question.

"Oh, yes, sir. The nurse threw away some and Miss Lawson got rid of all the old lot in the medicine-cupboard in the bathroom."

"Is that where the—er—Dr. Longbottom's Little Capsules were kept?"

"No, they were kept in the medicine-cupboard in the dining-room so as to be handy for using when needed as directed."

"What nurse attended Miss Arundell? Can you give me her name and address?"

Ellen could supply that at once and did.

Poirot continued to ask questions about Miss Arundell's last illness.

Ellen gave details with relish, describing the sickness, the pain, the onset of jaundice, and the final delirium. I don't know whether Poirot got any satisfaction out of the catalogue. He listened patiently enough and occasionally interpolated some pertinent little question, usually about Miss Lawson and the amount of time she spent in the sick-room. He was also exceedingly interested in the diet administered to the ill woman, comparing it with that administered to some dead relative (non-existent) of his own.

Seeing that they were enjoying themselves so much, I stole out in the hall again. Bob had gone to sleep on the landing, his ball lying under his chin.

I whistled to him and he sprang up, alert at once. This time, however, doubtless out of offended dignity, he made a protracted business of dispatching the ball down to me, several times catching it back at the last minute.

"Disappointed, aren't you? Well, perhaps I will let you have it this time."

When I next went back to the morning-room, Poirot

was talking about Dr. Tanios's surprise visit on the Sunday before the old lady's death.

"Yes, sir, Mr. Charles and Miss Theresa were out for a walk. Dr. Tanios wasn't expected, I know. The mistress was lying down and she was very surprised when I told her who it was. 'Dr. Tanios?' she said. 'Is Mrs. Tanios with him?' I told her no, the gentleman had come alone. So she said to tell him she'd be down in a minute."

"Did he stay long?"

"Not above an hour, sir. He didn't look too pleased when he went away."

"Have you any idea of the—er—purpose of his visit?"

"I couldn't say, I'm sure, sir."

"You did not happen to hear anything?"

Ellen's face flushed suddenly.

"No, I did *not*, sir! I've never been one to listen at doors, no matter what *some* people will do—and people who ought to know better!"

"Oh, but you misunderstand me." Poirot was eager, apologetic. "It just occurred to me that perhaps you might have brought in tea while the gentleman was there and if so, you could hardly have helped hearing what he and your mistress were talking about."

Ellen was mollified.

"I'm sorry, sir, I misunderstood you. No, Dr. Tanios didn't stay for tea."

Poirot looked up at her and twinkled a little.

"And if I want to know what he came down for—well, it is possible that Miss Lawson might be in a position to know? Is that it?"

"Well, if she doesn't know, sir, nobody does," said Ellen with a sniff.

"Let me see." Poirot frowned as though trying to remember. "Miss Lawson's bedroom—was it next to Miss Arundell's?"

"No, sir. Miss Lawson's room is right at the top of the staircase. I can show you, sir."

Poirot accepted the offer. As he went up the stairs he kept close to the wall side, and just as he reached the

top uttered an exclamation and stooped to his trouser-leg.

"Ah—I have just caught a thread—ah, yes, there is a nail here in the skirting-board."

"Yes, there is, sir. I think it must have worked loose or something. I've caught my dress on it once or twice."

"Has it been like that long?"

"Well, some time, I'm afraid, sir. I noticed it first when the mistress was laid up—after her accident, that was, sir—I tried to pull it out but I couldn't."

"It has had a thread round it some time, I think."

"That's right, sir, there was a little loop of thread, I remember. I can't think what for, I'm sure."

But there was no suspicion in Ellen's voice. To her it was just one of the things that occur in houses and which one does not bother to explain!

Poirot had stepped into the room at the top of the stairs. It was of moderate size. There were two windows directly facing us. There was a dressing-table across one corner and between the windows was a wardrobe with a long mirror. The bed was to the right behind the door facing the windows. On the left-hand wall of the room was a big mahogany chest of drawers and a marble-topped washstand.

Poirot looked round the room thoughtfully and then came out again on the landing. He went along the passage, passing two other bedrooms, and then came to the large bed-chamber which had belonged to Emily Arundell.

"The nurse had the little room next door," Ellen explained.

Poirot nodded thoughtfully.

As we descended the stairs, he asked if he might walk round the garden.

"Oh, yes, sir, certainly. It looks lovely just now."

"The gardener is still employed?"

"Angus? Oh, yes, Angus is still here. Miss Lawson wants everything kept nice because she thinks it will sell better that way."

"I think she is wise. To let a place run to seed is not the good policy."

The garden was very peaceful and beautiful. The wide borders were full of lupins and delphiniums and great scarlet poppies. The peonies were in bud. Wandering along, we came presently to a potting-shed where a big, rugged old man was busy. He saluted us respectfully and Poirot engaged him in conversation.

A mention that we had seen Mr. Charles that day thawed the old man and he became quite garrulous.

"Always a one, he was! I've known him come out here with half a gooseberry pie and the cook hunting high and low for it! And he'd go back with such an innocent face that durned if they wouldn't say it must have been the cat, though I've never known a cat eat a gooseberry pie! Oh, he's a one, Mr. Charles is!"

"He was down here in April, wasn't he?"

"Yes, down here two week-ends. Just before the missus died, it was."

"Did you see much of him?"

"A good bit, I did. There wasn't much for a young gentleman to do down here, and that's a fact. Used to stroll up to The George and have one. And then he'd potter round here, asking me questions about one thing and another."

"About flowers?"

"Yes—flowers—and weeds too." The old man chuckled.

"Weeds?"

Poirot's voice held a sudden, tentative note. He turned his head and looked searchingly along the shelves. His eye stopped at a tin.

"Perhaps he wanted to know how you got rid of them?"

"He did that!"

"I suppose this is the stuff you use."

Poirot turned the tin gently round and read the label.

"That's it," said Angus. "Very handy stuff it is."

"Dangerous stuff?"

"Not if you use it right. It's arsenic, of course. Had a bit of a joke about that, Mr. Charles and I did. Said as how when he had a wife and didn't like her, he'd come to me and get a little of that stuff to put her away with! Maybe, I sez, *she'll* be the one that wants to do away

with you! Ah, that made him laugh proper, that did. It was a good one, that!"

We laughed as in duty bound. Poirot prised up the lid of the tin.

"Nearly empty," he murmured.

The old man had a look.

"Ay, there's more gone than I thought. No idea I've used that much. I'll be having to order some more."

"Yes," said Poirot, smiling. "I'm afraid there's hardly enough for you to spare me some for *my* wife!"

We all had another good laugh over this witticism.

"You're not married, I take it, mister?"

"No."

"Ah! It's always them as isn't that can afford to joke about it. Those that isn't married don't know what trouble is!"

"I gather that your wife—?" Poirot paused delicately.

"She's alive all right—very much so."

Angus seemed a little depressed about it.

Complimenting him on his garden, we bade him farewell.

CHAPTER XXI

The Chemist. The Nurse. The Doctor

The tin of weed-killer had started a new train of thought in my mind. It was the first definite suspicious circumstance that I had encountered. Charles's interest in it, the old gardener's obvious surprise at finding the tin almost empty—it all seemed to point in the right direction.

Poirot was, as usual when I am excited, very non-committal.

"Even if some of the weed-killer *has* been taken, there is as yet no evidence that Charles was the person to take it, Hastings."

"But he talked so much to the gardener about it!"

"Not a very wise procedure if he was going to help himself to some."

Then he went on :

"What is the first and simplest poison to come into your mind if you were asked to name one quickly?"

"Arsenic, I suppose."

"Yes. You understand, then, that very marked pause before the word 'strychnine' when Charles was talking to us to-day."

"You mean—?"

"That he was about to say 'arsenic in the soup,' and stopped himself."

"Ah!" I said, "and why did he stop himself?"

"Exactly. *Why?* I may say, Hastings, that it was to find the answer to that particular 'why?' which made me go out into the garden in search of any likely source of weed-killer."

"And you found it!"

"And I found it."

I shook my head.

"It begins to look rather bad for young Charles. You had a good talk with Ellen over the old lady's illness. Did her symptoms resemble those of arsenic poisoning?"

Poirot rubbed his nose.

"It is difficult to say. There was abdominal pain—sickness."

"Of course—that's it!"

"H'm, I am not so sure."

"What poison did it resemble?"

"*Eh bien*, my friend, it resembled not so much poison as disease of the liver and death from that cause!"

"Oh, Poirot," I cried. "It *can't* be natural death! It's *got* to be murder!"

"Oh, *là là*, we seem to have changed places, you and I."

He turned abruptly into a chemist's shop. After a long discussion of Poirot's particular internal troubles, he purchased a small box of indigestion lozenges. Then, when his purchase was wrapped up and he was about to leave the shop, his attention was taken by an attract-

ively wrapped package of Dr. Loughbarrow's Liver Capsules.

"Yes, sir, a very good preparation." The chemist was a middle-aged man of a chatty disposition. "You'll find them very efficacious."

"Miss Arundell used to take them, I remember. Miss Emily Arundell."

"Indeed she did, sir. Miss Arundell of Littlegreen House. A fine old lady, one of the old school. I used to serve her."

"Did she take many patent medicines?"

"Not really, sir. Not so many as some elderly ladies I could name. Miss Lawson, now, her companion, the one that's come into all the money—"

Poirot nodded.

"She was a one for this, that, and the other. Pills, lozenges, dyspepsia tablets, digestive mixtures, blood mixtures. Really enjoyed herself among the bottles." He smiled ruefully. "I wish there were more like her. People nowadays don't take to medicines as they used to. Still, we sell a lot of toilet preparations to make up for it."

"Did Miss Arundell take these Liver Capsules regularly?"

"Yes, she'd been taking them for three months, I think, before she died."

"A relative of hers, a Dr. Tanios, came in to have a mixture made up one day, didn't he?"

"Yes, of course, the Greek gentleman that married Miss Arundell's niece. Yes, a very interesting mixture it was. One I've not previously become acquainted with."

The man spoke as of a rare botanical trophy.

"It makes a change, sir, when you get something new. Very interesting combination of drugs, I remember. Of course, the gentleman is a doctor. Very nice he was—a pleasant way with him."

"Did his wife do any shopping here?"

"Did she now? I don't recall. Oh, yes, came in for a sleeping-draught—chloral it was, I remember. A double quantity the prescription was for. It's always

a little difficult for us with hypnotic drugs. You see, most doctors don't prescribe much at a time."

"Whose prescription was it?"

"Her husband's, I think. Oh, of course, it was quite all *right*—but, you know, we have to be careful nowadays. Perhaps you don't know the fact, but if a doctor makes a mistake in a prescription and we make it up in all good faith and anything goes wrong it's we who have to take the blame—not the doctor."

"That seems very unfair!"

"It's worrying, I'll admit. Ah, well, I can't complain. No trouble has come *my* way—touching wood."

He rapped the counter sharply with his knuckles.

Poirot decided to buy a package of Dr. Loughbarrow's Liver Capsules.

"Thank you, sir. Which size—25, 50, 100?"

"I suppose the larger ones are better value—but still—"

"Have the 50, sir. That's the size Miss Arundell had. Eight and six."

Poirot agreed, paid over eight and six and received the parcel.

Then we left the shop.

"So Mrs. Tanios bought a sleeping-draught," I exclaimed as we got out into the street. "An overdose of that would kill any one, wouldn't it?"

"With the greatest of ease."

"Do you think old Miss Arundell—"

I was remembering Miss Lawson's words, "*I dare say she'd murder some one if he told her to!*"

Poirot shook his head.

"Chloral is a narcotic and a hypnotic. Used to alleviate pain and as a sleeping-draught. It can also become a habit."

"Do you think Mrs. Tanios had acquired the habit?"

Poirot shook his head perplexedly.

"No, I hardly think so. But it is curious. I can think of one explanation. But that would mean—"

He broke off and looked at his watch.

"Come, let us see if we can find this Nurse Carruthers who was with Miss Arundell in her last illness."

Nurse Carruthers proved to be a sensible-looking, middle-aged woman.

Poirot now appeared in yet another rôle and with one more fictitious relative. This time he had an aged mother for whom he was anxious to find a sympathetic hospital nurse.

"You comprehend—I am going to speak to you quite frankly. My mother, she is difficult. We have had some excellent nurses, young women, fully competent, but the very fact that they are young has been against them. My mother dislikes young women, she insults them. She is rude and fractious, she fights against open windows and modern hygiene. It is very difficult." He sighed mournfully.

"I know," said Nurse Carruthers sympathetically. "It's very trying sometimes. One has to use a lot of tact. It's no use upsetting a patient. Better to give in to them as far as you can. And once they feel you're not trying to force things on them, they very often relax and give in like lambs."

"Ah, I see that you would be ideal in the part. You understand old ladies."

"I've had to do with a few in my time," said Nurse Carruthers with a laugh. "You can do a lot with patience and good humour."

"That is so wise. You nursed Miss Arnold, I believe. Now, she would not have been an easy old lady."

"Oh, I don't know. She was very difficult. No, I didn't find her difficult at all. Of course, I wasn't here any length of time. She died on the fourth day."

"I was talking to her niece, Miss Thomas, yesterday."

"Really. Fancy that now! That I always say for the world's a small place!"

"You know her, I expect?"

"Well, of course she came down the road and she was here for the funeral. And of course I've seen her about before when she's been coming down."

A very handsome girl."

"Yes, indeed—"

Nurse Carruthers, conscious of her own comfortable plumpness, preened herself slightly.

"Of course," she said, "one shouldn't be *too* thin."

"Poor girl," continued Poirot. "I am sorry for her. *Entre nous*," he leaned forward confidentially, "her aunt's will was a great blow."

"I suppose it must have been," said Nurse Carruthers. "I know it caused a good deal of *talk*."

"I cannot imagine what induced Miss Arundell to disinherit all her family. It seems an extraordinary procedure."

"Most extraordinary. I agree with you. And, of course, people say there must have been something behind it all."

"Did you ever get any idea of the *reason*? Did old Miss Arundell say anything?"

"No. Not to me—that is."

"But to somebody else?"

"Well, I rather fancy she mentioned *something* to Miss Lawson because I heard Miss Lawson say, 'Yes, dear, but you see it's at the lawyer's.' And Miss Arundell said, 'I'm sure it's in the drawer downstairs.' And Miss Lawson said, 'No, you sent it to Mr. Purvis. Don't you remember?' And then my patient had an attack of nausea again and Miss Lawson went away while I saw to her, but I've often wondered if it was the will they were talking about."

"It certainly seems probable."

Nurse Carruthers went on :

"If so, I expect Miss Arundell was worried and perhaps wanted to alter it—but there, she was so ill, poor dear, after that—that she was past thinking of anything."

"Did Miss Lawson take part in the nursing at all?" asked Poirot.

"Oh, dear no, she was no manner of good! Too fussy, you know. She only irritated my patient."

"Did you, then, do all the nursing yourself? *C'est formidable ça*."

"The maid—what was her name—Ellen, helped me. Ellen was very good. She was used to illness and used

to looking after the old lady. We managed pretty well between us. As a matter of fact, Dr. Grainger was sending in a night nurse on the Friday, but Miss Arundell died before the night nurse arrived."

"Perhaps Miss Lawson helped to prepare some of the invalid's food?"

"No, she didn't do anything at all. There wasn't really anything to prepare. I had the Valentine and the brandy—and the Brand's and glucose and all that. All Miss Lawson did was to go about the house crying and getting in every one's way."

The nurse's tone held distinct acrimony.

"I can see," said Poirot, smiling, "that you have not a very high opinion of Miss Lawson's usefulness."

"Companions are usually a poor lot, in my opinion. They're not *trained*, you see, in any way. Just *amateurs*. And usually they're women who wouldn't be any good at anything else."

"Do you think Miss Lawson was very attached to Miss Arundell?"

"She seemed to be. Very upset and took on terribly when the old lady died. More than the relatives did, in *my* opinion," Nurse Carruthers finished with a sniff.

"Perhaps, then," said Poirot, nodding his head sagely, "Miss Arundell knew what she was doing when she left her money as she did."

"She was a very shrewd old lady," said the nurse. "There wasn't much *she* didn't take in and know about, I must say!"

"Did she mention the dog, Bob, at all?"

"It's funny you should say that! She talked about him a lot—when she was delirious. Something about his ball and a fall she'd had. A nice dog, Bob was—I'm very fond of dogs. Poor fellow, he was very miserable when she died. Wonderful, aren't they? Quite human."

And on the note of the humanity of dogs, we parted.

"There is one who has clearly no suspicions," remarked Poirot after we had left.

He sounded slightly discouraged.

We had a bad dinner at The George—Poirot groaning a good deal, especially over the soup.

"And it is so easy, Hastings, to make good soup. *Le pot au feu*—"

I avoided a disquisition on cookery with some difficulty.

After dinner we had a surprise.

We were sitting in the "lounge" which we had to ourselves. There had been one other man at dinner—a commercial traveller by his appearance—but he had gone out. I was just idly turning over the pages of an antiquated *Stock-Breeder's Gazette* or some such periodical when I suddenly heard Poirot's name being mentioned.

The voice in question was somewhere outside.

"Where is he? In here? Right—I can find him."

The door was flung violently open, and Dr. Grainger, his face rather red, his eyebrows working irritably, strode into the room. He paused to close the door and then advanced upon us in no uncertain fashion.

"Oh, here you are! Now then, M. Hercule Poirot, what the devil do you mean by coming round to see me and telling me a pack of lies?"

"One of the juggler's balls?" I murmured maliciously. Poirot said in his oiliest voice :

"My dear doctor, you must allow me to explain—"

"Allow you? Allow you? Damn it, I'll force you to explain! You're a detective, that's what you are! A nosing, prying detective! Coming round to me and feeding me up with a pack of lies about writing old General Arundell's biography! More fool me to be taken in by such a damn fool story."

"Who told you of my identity?" asked Poirot.

"Who told me? Miss Peabody told me. She saw through you all right!"

"Miss Peabody—yes." Poirot sounded reflective. "I rather thought—"

Dr. Grainger cut in angrily.

"Now then, sir, I'm waiting for your explanation!"

"Certainly. My explanation is very simple. *Attempted murder.*"

"What? What's that?"

Poirot said quietly :

"Miss Arundell had a fall, did she not? A fall down the stairs shortly before her death?"

"Yes, what of it? She slipped on that damned dog's ball."

Poirot shook his head.

"No, Doctor, *she did not*. A *thread* was fastened across the top of the stairs so as to trip her up."

Dr. Grainger stared.

"Then why didn't she tell me so?" he demanded. "Never said a word to me about it."

"That is perhaps understandable—if it were a *member of her own family* who placed that thread there!"

"H'm—I see." Grainger cast a sharp glance at Poirot, then threw himself into a chair. "Well?" he said. "How did you come to be mixed up in this affair?"

"Miss Arundell wrote to me, stressing the utmost secrecy. Unfortunately the letter was delayed."

Poirot proceeded to give certain carefully edited details and explained the finding of the nail driven into the skirting-board.

The doctor listened with a grave face. His anger had abated.

"You can comprehend my position was a difficult one," Poirot finished. "I was employed, you see, by a dead woman. But I counted the obligation none the less strong for that."

Dr. Grainger's brows were drawn together in thought.

"And you've no idea who it was stretched that thread across the head of the stairs?" he asked.

"I have no *evidence* as to who it was. I will not say I have no *idea*."

"It's a nasty story," said Grainger, his face grim.

"Yes. You can understand, can you not, that to begin with I was uncertain whether there had or had not been a sequel?"

"Eh? What's that?"

"To all intents and purposes Miss Arundell died a natural death, but could one be sure of that? There had

been *one* attempt on her life. How could I be sure that there had not been a second? And this a successful one!"

Grainger nodded thoughtfully.

"I suppose you are *sure*, Dr. Grainger—please do not get angry—that Miss Arundell's death *was* a natural one? I have come across certain evidence to-day—"

He detailed the conversation he had had with old Angus, Charles Arundell's interest in the weed-killer, and finally the old man's surprise at the emptiness of the tin.

Grainger listened with keen attention. When Poirot had finished he said quietly :

"I see your point. Many a case of arsenical poisoning has been diagnosed as acute gastric enteritis and a certificate given—especially when there are no suspicious contributing circumstances. In any case, arsenical poisoning presents certain difficulties—it has so many different forms. It may be acute, subacute, nervous or chronic. There may be vomiting and abdominal pain—these symptoms may be entirely absent—the person may fall suddenly to the ground and expire shortly afterwards—there may be narcotism and paralysis. The symptoms vary widely."

Poirot said :

:"*Eh bien*, taking the facts into account, what is your opinion?"

Dr. Grainger was silent for a minute or two. Then he said slowly :

"Taking everything into account, and without any bias whatever, I am of the opinion that no form of arsenical poisoning could account for the symptoms in Miss Arundell's case. She died, I am quite convinced, of yellow atrophy of the liver. I have, as you know, attended her for many years, and she has suffered previously from attacks similar to that which caused her death. That is my considered opinion, M. Poirot."

And there, perforce, the matter had to rest.

It seemed rather an anticlimax when, somewhat apologetically, Poirot produced the package of Liver Capsules he had bought at the chemist's.

"Miss Arundell took these, I believe?" he said. "I suppose they could not be injurious in any way?"

"That stuff? No harm in it. *Aloes—podophyllin*—all quite mild and harmless," said Grainger. "She liked trying the stuff. I didn't mind."

He got up.

"You dispensed certain medicines for her yourself?" asked Poirot.

"Yes—a mild liver pill to be taken after food." His eyes twinkled. "She could have taken a boxful without hurting herself. I'm not given to poisoning my patients, M. Poirot."

Then, with a smile, he shook hands with us both and departed.

Poirot undid the package he had purchased at the chemist's. The medicament consisted of transparent capsules, three-quarters full of a dark brown powder.

"They look like a seasick remedy I once took," I remarked.

Poirot opened a capsule, examined its contents and tasted it gingerly with his tongue. He made a grimace.

"Well," I said, throwing myself back in my chair and yawning. "Everything seems harmless enough. Dr. Loughbarrow's specialties, and Dr. Grainger's pills! And Dr. Grainger seems definitely to negative the arsenic theory. Are you convinced at last, my stubborn Poirot?"

"It is true that I am pig-headed—that is your expression, I think? Yes, definitely I have the head of the pig," said my friend meditatively.

"Then, in spite of having the chemist, the nurse and the doctor against you, you still think that Miss Arundell was murdered?"

Poirot said quietly: "That is what I believe. No—more than believe. I am *sure* of it, Hastings."

"There's one way of proving it, I suppose," I said slowly. "Exhumation."

Poirot nodded.

"Is that the next step?"

"My friend, I have to go carefully."

"Why?"

"Because," his voice dropped, "I am afraid of a second tragedy."

"You mean—?"

"I am afraid, Hastings, I am afraid. Let us leave it at that."

CHAPTER XXII

The Woman on the Stairs

On the following morning a note arrived by hand. It was in a rather weak, uncertain handwriting slanting very much uphill.

Dear M. Poirot,

I hear from Ellen that you were at Littlegreen House yesterday. I shall be much obliged if you could call and see me sometime to-day.

Yourstruly,

WILHELMINA LAWSON.

"So *she's* down here," I remarked.

"Yes."

"Why has she come, I wonder?"

Poirot smiled. "I do not suppose there is any sinister reason. After all, the house belongs to her."

"Yes, that's true, of course. You know, Poirot, that's the worst of this game of ours. Every single little thing that any one does is open to the most sinister constructions."

"It is true that I myself have enjoined upon you the motto, 'suspect every one.' "

"Are you still in that state yourself?"

"No—for me it has boiled down to this. I suspect one particular person."

"Which one?"

"Since, at the moment, it is only suspicion and there is no definite proof, I think I must leave you to draw your

own deductions, Hastings. And do not neglect the psychology—that is important. The character of the murderer—implying as it does a certain temperament in the murderer—that is an essential clue to the crime.”

“I can’t consider the character of the murderer if I don’t know who the murderer is!”

“No, no, you have not paid attention to what I have just said. If you reflect sufficiently on the character—the necessary character of the *murder*—then you will realize *who* the murderer is!”

“Do you really know, Poirot?” I asked curiously.

“I cannot say I *know* because I have no proofs. That is why I cannot say more at the present. But I am quite sure—yes, my friend, in my own mind I am very sure.”

“Well,” I said, laughing, “mind he doesn’t get *you*! That *would* be a tragedy!”

Poirot started a little. He did not take the matter as a joke. Instead he murmured: “You are right. I must be careful—extremely careful.”

“You ought to wear a coat of chain mail,” I said chaffingly. “And employ a taster in case of poison! In fact, you ought to have a regular band of gunmen to protect you!”

“*Merci*, Hastings, I shall rely on my wits.”

He then wrote a note to Miss Lawson saying that he would call at Littlegreen House at eleven o’clock.

After that we breakfasted and then strolled out into the Square. It was about a quarter past ten and a hot sleepy morning.

I was looking into the window of the antique shop at a very nice set of Hepplewhite chairs when I received a highly painful lunge in the ribs, and a sharp, penetrating voice said: “Hi!”

I spun round indignantly to find myself face to face with Miss Peabody. In her hand (the instrument of her assault upon me) was a large and powerful umbrella with a spiked point.

Apparently completely callous to the severe pain she had inflicted, she observed in a satisfied voice:

"Ha! Thought it was you. Don't often make a mistake."

I said rather coldly :

"Er—good-morning. Can I do anything for you?"

"You can tell me how that friend of yours is getting on with his book—*Life of General Arundell*?"

"He hasn't actually started to write it yet," I said.

Miss Peabody indulged in a little silent but apparently satisfying laughter. She shook like a jelly. Recovering from that attack, she remarked :

"No, I don't suppose he will be starting to write it."

I said, smiling :

"So you saw through our little fiction?"

"What d'you take me for—a fool?" asked Miss Peabody.

"I saw soon enough what your downy friend was after! Wanted me to talk! Well, I didn't mind. I like talking. Hard to get any one to listen nowadays. Quite enjoyed myself that afternoon."

She cocked a shrewd eye at me.

"What's it all about, eh? What's it all about?"

I was hesitating what exactly to reply when Poirot joined us. He bowed with *empressement* to Miss Peabody.

"Good-morning, mademoiselle. Enchanted to encounter you."

"Good-morning," said Miss Peabody. "What are you this morning, Parotti or Poirot—eh?"

"It was very clever of you to pierce my disguise so rapidly," said Poirot, smiling.

"Wasn't much disguise to pierce! Not many like you about, are there? Don't know if that's a good thing or a bad one. Difficult to say."

"I prefer, mademoiselle, to be unique."

"You've got your wish, I should say," said Miss Peabody drily. "Now then, Mr. Poirot, I gave you all the gossip you wanted the other day. Now it's my turn to ask questions. What's it all about? Eh? What's it all about?"

"Are you not asking a question to which you already know the answer?"

"I wonder." She shot a sharp glance at him. "Something fishy about that will? Or is it something else? Going to dig Emily up? Is that it?"

Poirot did not answer.

Miss Peabody nodded her head slowly and thoughtfully as though she had received a reply.

"Often wondered," she said, inconsequently, "what it would feel like.... Readin' the papers, you know—wondered if any one would ever be dug up in Market Basing. ...Didn't think it would be Emily Arundell...."

She gave him a sudden, piercing look.

"She wouldn't have liked it, you know. I suppose you've thought of that—hey?"

"Yes, I have thought of it."

"I suppose you would do—you're not a fool! Don't think you're particularly officious either."

Poirot bowed. "Thank you, mademoiselle."

"And that's more than most people would say—looking at your moustache. Why d'you have a moustache like that? D'you like it?"

I turned away convulsed with laughter.

"In England the cult of the moustache is lamentably neglected," said Poirot. His hand surreptitiously caressed the hirsute adornment.

"Oh, I see! Funny," said Miss Peabody. "Knew a woman once who had a goitre and was proud of it! Wouldn't believe that, but it's true! Well, what I say is, it's lucky when you're pleased with what the Lord has given you. It's usually the other way about."

She shook her head and sighed.

"Never thought there would be a murder in this out-of-the-world spot." Again she shot a sudden, piercing look at Poirot. "Which of 'em did it?"

"Am I to shout that to you here in the street?"

"Probably means you don't know. Or do you? Oh, well—bad blood. I'd like to know whether that Varley woman poisoned her husband or not. Makes a difference."

"You believe in heredity?"

Miss Peabody said suddenly :

"I'd rather it was Tanios. An outsider! But wishes ain't horses, worse luck. Well, I'll be getting along. I can see you're not goin' to tell me anything.... Who are you actin' for, by the way?"

Poirot said gravely :

"I am acting for the dead, mademoiselle."

I am sorry to say that Miss Peabody received this remark with a sudden shriek of laughter. Quickly subduing her mirth she said :

"Excuse me. It sounded like Isabel Tripp—that's all! What an awful woman! Julia's worse, I think. So painfully girlish. Never did like mutton dressed lamb-fashion. Well, good-bye. Seen Dr. Grainger at all?"

"Mademoiselle, I have the bone to pick with you. You betrayed my secret."

Miss Peabody indulged in her peculiar throaty chuckle.

"Men are simple! He'd swallowed that preposterous tissue of lies you told him. Wasn't he mad when I told him! Went away snorting with rage! He's looking for you."

"He found me last night."

"Oh! I wish I'd been there."

"I wish you had, mademoiselle," said Poirot gallantly.

Miss Peabody laughed and prepared to waddle away. She addressed me over her shoulder.

"Good-bye, young man. Don't you go buying those chairs. They're a fake."

She moved off, chuckling.

"That," said Poirot, "is a very clever old woman."

"Even although she did not admire your moustaches?"

"Taste is one thing," said Poirot coldly. "Brains are another."

We passed into the shop and spent a pleasant twenty minutes looking round. We emerged unscathed in pocket and proceeded in the direction of Littlegreen House.

Ellen, rather redder in the face than usual, admitted us and showed us into the drawing-room. Presently footsteps were heard descending the stairs and Miss Lawson came in. She seemed somewhat out of breath and flustered. Her hair was pinned up in a silk handkerchief.

"I hope you'll excuse my coming in like this, M. Poirot. I've been going through some locked-up cupboards—so many things—old people are inclined to hoard a little, I'm afraid—dear Miss Arundell was no exception—and one gets so much dust in one's hair—astonishing, you know, the things people collect—if you can believe me, two dozen needlebooks—actually, two dozen."

"You mean that Miss Arundell had bought two dozen needlebooks?"

"Yes, and put them away and forgot about them—and, of course, now the needles are all rusty—such a pity. She used to give them to the maids as Christmas presents."

"She was very forgetful—yes?"

"Oh, *very*. Especially in the way of putting things away. Like a dog with a bone, you know. That's what we used to call it between us. 'Now don't go and dog and bone it,' I used to say to her."

She laughed and then producing a small handkerchief from her pocket suddenly began to sniff.

"Oh, dear," she said tearfully. "It seems so dreadful of me to be laughing here."

"You have too much sensibility," said Poirot. "You feel things too much."

"That's what my mother always used to say to me, M. Poirot. 'You take things to heart too much, Mina,' she used to say. It's a great drawback, M. Poirot, to be so sensitive. Especially when one has one's living to get."

"Ah, yes, indeed, but that is all a thing of the past. You are now your own mistress. You can enjoy yourself—travel—you have absolutely no worries or anxieties."

"I suppose that's true," said Miss Lamson rather doubtfully.

"Assuredly it is true. Now talking of Miss Arundell's forgetfulness I see how it was that her letter to me never reached me for so long a time."

He explained the circumstances of the finding of the letter. A red spot showed in Miss Lamson's dress. She said:

"Ellen should have told *me*! To send that letter off to you without a word was great impertinence! She should have consulted me first. *Great* impertinence, I call it! Not one word did I hear about the whole thing. Disgraceful!"

"Oh, my dear lady, I am sure it was done in all good faith."

"Well, I think it was very *peculiar* myself! *Very* peculiar! Servants really do the oddest things. Ellen should have remembered that I am the mistress of the house now."

She drew herself up importantly.

"Ellen was very devoted to her mistress, was she not?" said Poirot.

"Yes, I dare say, but that makes no difference. I should have been *told*!"

"The important thing is—that I received the letter," said Poirot.

"Oh, I agree that it's no good making a fuss after things have happened, but all the same I think Ellen ought to be told that she mustn't take it upon herself to do things without asking first!"

She stopped, a red spot on each cheekbone.

Poirot was silent for a minute, then he said:-

"You wanted to see me to-day? In what way can I be of service to you?"

Miss Lawson's annoyance subsided as promptly as it had arisen. She began to be flustered and incoherent again.

"Well, really—you see, I just *wondered*... Well, to tell the truth, M. Poirot, I arrived down here yesterday and, of course, Ellen told me you had been here, and I just wondered—well, as you hadn't *mentioned* to me that you were coming—Well, it seemed rather *odd*—and I couldn't see—"

"You could not see what I was doing down here?" Poirot finished for her.

"I—well—no, that's exactly it. I couldn't."

She looked at him, flushing but inquiring.

"I must make a little confession to you," said Poirot.

"I have permitted you to remain under a misapprehension, I am afraid. You assumed that the letter I received from Miss Arundell concerned itself with the question of a small sum of money abstracted by—in all possibility—Mr. Charles Arundell."

Miss Lawson nodded.

"But that, you see, was not the case.... In fact, the first I heard of the stolen money was from you.... Miss Arundell wrote to me on the subject of her accident."

"Her accident?"

"Yes, she had a fall downstairs, I understand."

"Oh, quite—quite—" Miss Lawson looked bewildered. She stared vacantly at Poirot. She went on. "But—I'm sorry—I'm sure it's very stupid of me—but why should she write to *you*? I understand—in fact, I think you said so—that you are a detective. You're not a—a doctor too? Or a faith healer, perhaps?"

"No, I am not a doctor—nor a faith healer. But, like the doctor, I concern myself sometimes with so-called accidental deaths."

"With accidental deaths?"

"With *so-called* accidental deaths, I said. It is true that Miss Arundell did not *die*—but she might have died!"

"Oh, dear me, yes, the doctor said so, but I don't understand—"

Miss Lawson sounded still bewildered.

"The cause of the accident was supposed to be the ball of the little Bob, was it not?"

"Yes, yes, that was it. It was Bob's ball."

"Oh, no, it was not Bob's ball."

"But, excuse me, Mr. Poirot, I saw it there myself—as we all ran down."

"You saw it—yes, perhaps. But *it was not the cause of the accident. The cause of the accident, Miss Lawson, was a dark-coloured thread stretched about a foot above the top of the stairs!*"

"But—but a dog couldn't—"

"Exactly," said Poirot quickly. "A dog could not do that—he is not sufficiently intelligent—or, if you like,

he is not sufficiently *evil*.... A *human being* put that thread in position...."

Miss Lawson's face had gone deadly white. She raised a shaking hand to her face.

"Oh, Mr. Poirot—I can't believe it—you don't mean—but that is awful—really awful. You mean it was done on *purpose*?"

"Yes, it was done on purpose."

"But that's dreadful. It's almost like—like killing a person."

"If it had succeeded it *would* have been killing a person! In other words—it would have been murder!"

Miss Lawson gave a little shrill cry.

Poirot went on in the same grave tone.

"A nail was driven into the skirting-board so that the thread could be attached. That nail was varnished so as not to show. Tell me, do you ever remember a smell of varnish that you could not account for?"

Miss Lawson gave a cry.

"Oh, how extraordinary! To think of that! Why, of course! And to think I never thought—never dreamed—but then, how could I? And yet it did seem odd to me at the time."

Poirot leant forward.

"So—you can help us, mademoiselle. Once again you can help us. *C'est épatant!*"

"To think that was it! Oh, well, it all fits in."

"Tell me, I pray of you. You smelt varnish—yes?"

"Yes. Of course, I didn't know what it was. I thought—dear me—is it paint—no, it's more like floor stain, and then, of course, I thought I must have *imagined* it."

"When was this?"

"Now let me see—when was it?"

"Was it during that Easter week-end when the house was full of guests?"

"Yes, that was the time—but I'm trying to recall just which day it was.... Now, let me see, it wasn't Sunday. No, and it wasn't on Tuesday—that was the night Dr. Donaldson came to dinner. And on the Wednesday

"The tap that aroused you would be the tap of the hammer on the nail," mused Poirot.

"Yes, I suppose it would. But oh, M. Poirot, how dreadful—how truly dreadful. I've always felt Theresa was, perhaps, a little *wild*, but to do a thing like that—"

"You are sure it was Theresa?"

"Oh, dear me, yes."

"It couldn't have been Mrs. Tanios or one of the maids, for instance?"

"Oh, no, it was Theresa."

Miss Lawson shook her head and murmured to herself, "Oh, dear, oh, dear," several times.

Poirot was staring at her in a way I found it hard to understand.

"Permit me," he said suddenly, "to make an experiment. Let us go upstairs and endeavour to reconstruct this little scene."

"Reconstruct? Oh, really—I don't know—I mean I don't quite see—"

"I will show you," said Poirot, cutting in upon these doubts in an authoritative manner.

Somewhat flustered, Miss Lawson led the way upstairs.

"I hope the room's tidy—so much to do—what with one thing and another—" She tailed off incoherently.

The room was indeed somewhat heavily littered with miscellaneous articles, obviously the result of Miss Lawson's turning out of cupboards. With her usual incoherence Miss Lawson managed to indicate her own position and Poirot was able to verify for himself the fact that a portion of the staircase was reflected in the wall-mirror.

"And now, mademoiselle," he suggested, "if you will be so good as to go out and reproduce the actions that you saw."

Miss Lawson, still murmuring, "Oh, dear—" bustled out to fulfil her part. Poirot acted the part of observer.

The performance concluded, he went out on the landing and asked which electric light had been left switched on.

"This one—this one along here. Just outside Miss Arundell's door."

Poirot reached up, detached the bulb and examined it.
"A forty-watt lamp, I see. Not very powerful."

"No, it was just so that the passage shouldn't be quite dark."

Poirot retraced his steps to the top of the stairs.

"You will pardon me, mademoiselle, but with the light being fairly dim and the way that shadow falls it is hardly possible that you can have seen very clearly. Can you be positive it was Miss Theresa Arundell and not just an indeterminate female figure in a dressing-gown?"

Miss Lawson was indignant.

"No, indeed, M. Poirot! I'm *perfectly* sure! I know Theresa well enough, I should hope! Oh, it was her all right. Her dark dressing-gown and that big shining brooch she wears with the initials—I saw that plainly."

"So that there is no possible doubt. You saw the initials?"

"Yes, T. A. I know the brooch. Theresa often wore it. Oh, yes, I could swear to its being Theresa—and I will swear to it if necessary!"

There was a firmness and decision in those last two sentences that was quite at variance with her usual manner.

Poirot looked at her. Again there was something in his glance. It was aloof, appraising—and had also a queer appearance of finality about it.

"You would swear to that, yes?" he said.

"If—if—it's necessary. But I suppose it—will it be necessary?"

Again Poirot turned that appraising glance upon her.

"That will depend on the result of the exhumation," he said.

"Ex-exhumation?"

Poirot put out a restraining hand. In her excitement Miss Lawson very nearly went headlong down the stairs.

"It may possibly be a question of exhumation," he said.

"Oh, but surely—how *very* unpleasant! But I mean, I'm sure the family would oppose the idea very strongly—very strongly indeed."

"Probably they will."

"I'm quite sure they won't hear of such a thing!"

"Ah, but if it is an order from the Home Office."

"But, M. Poirot—*why?* I mean it's not as though—not as though—"

"Not as though what?"

"Not as though there were anything—*wrong.*"

"You think not?"

"No, of course not. Why, there *couldn't* be! I mean the doctor and the nurse and everything—"

"Do not upset yourself," said Poirot calmly and soothingly.

"Oh, but I can't help it! Poor dear Miss Arundell! It's not even as though Theresa had been here in the house when she died."

"No, she left on the Monday before she was taken ill, did she not?"

"Quite early in the morning. So you see, *she* can't have had anything to do with it!"

"Let us hope not," said Poirot.

"Oh, dear." Miss Lawson clasped her hands together. "I've never known *anything* so dreadful as all this! Really, I don't know whether I'm on my head or my heels."

Poirot glanced at his watch.

"We must depart. We are returning to London. And you, mademoiselle, you are remaining down here some little time?"

"No—no.... I have really no settled plans. Actually I'm going back myself to-day.... I only came down just for a night to—to settle things a little."

"I see. Well, good-bye, mademoiselle, and forgive me if I have upset you at all."

"Oh, M. Poirot. *Upset* me? I feel quite ill! Oh, dear—oh, dear. It's such a *wicked* world! Such a dreadfully wicked world."

Poirot cut short her lamentations by taking her hand firmly in his.

"Quite so. And you are still ready to swear *that you saw Theresa Arundell kneeling on the stairs on the night of Easter Bank Holiday?*"

"Oh, yes, I can swear to that."

"And you can also swear that you saw a halo of light round Miss Arundell's head during the *séance*?"

Miss Lawson's mouth fell open.

"Oh, M. Poirot, don't—don't joke about these things."

"I am not joking. I am perfectly serious."

Miss Lawson said with dignity :

"It wasn't exactly a halo. It was more like the beginning of a manifestation. A ribbon of some luminous material. I think it was beginning to form into a face."

"Extremely interesting. *Au revoir*, mademoiselle, and please keep all this to yourself."

"Oh, of course—of course. I shouldn't dream of doing anything else...."

The last we saw of Miss Lawson was her rather sheep-like face gazing after us from the front-door step.

CHAPTER XXIII

Dr. Tanios Calls on Us

No sooner had we left the house than Poirot's manner changed. His face was grim and set.

"*Dépêchons nous*, Hastings," he said. "We must get back to London as soon as possible."

"I'm willing." I quickened my pace to suit his. I stole a look at his grave face.

"Who do you suspect, Poirot?" I asked. "I wish you'd tell me. Do you believe it was Theresa Arundell on the stairs or not?"

Poirot did not reply to my question. Instead he asked a question of his own.

"Did it strike you—reflect before you answer—did it strike you that there was something *wrong* with that statement of Miss Lawson's?"

"How do you mean—wrong with it?"

"If I knew that I should not be asking you!"

"Yes, but wrong in what way?"

"That is just it. I cannot be precise. But as she

was talking I had, somehow, a feeling of unreality... as though there was something—some small point that was wrong—that was, yes, that was the feeling—something that was *impossible*...."

"She seemed quite positive it was Theresa!"

"Yes, yes."

"But after all, the light couldn't have been very good. I don't see how she can be quite so sure."

"No, no, Hastings, you are not helping me. It was some small point—something connected with—yes, I am sure of it—with the bedroom."

"With the bedroom?" I repeated, trying to recall the details of the room. "No," I said at last. "I can't help you."

Poirot shook his head vexedly.

"Why did you bring up that spiritualistic business again?" I asked.

"Because it is important."

"What is important? Miss Lawson's luminous 'ribbon development'?"

"You remember the Misses Tripp's description of the *séance*?"

"I know they saw a halo round the old lady's head." I laughed in spite of myself. "I shouldn't think she was a saint by all accounts! Miss Lawson seems to have been terrified by her. I felt quite sorry for the poor woman when she described how she lay awake, worried to death because she might get into trouble over ordering too small a sirloin of beef."

"Yes, it was an interesting touch that."

"What are we going to do when we get to London?" I asked as we turned into The George and Poirot asked for the bill.

"We must go and see Theresa Arundell immediately."

"And find out the truth? But won't she deny the whole thing anyway?"

"*Mon cher*, it is not a criminal offence to kneel upon a flight of stairs! She may have been picking up a pin to bring her luck—something of that sort!"

"And the smell of varnish?"

We could say no more just then, as the waiter arrived with the bill.

On the way to London we talked very little. I am not fond of talking and driving, and Poirot was so busy protecting his moustaches with his muffler from the disastrous effects of wind and dust that speech was quite beyond him.

We arrived at the flat at about twenty to two.

George, Poirot's immaculate and extremely English manservant, opened the door.

"A Dr. Tanios is waiting to see you, sir. He has been here for half an hour."

"Dr. Tanios? Where is he?"

"In the sitting-room, sir. A lady also called to see you, sir. She seemed very distressed to find you were absent from home. It was before I received your telephone message, sir, so I could not tell her when you would be returning to London."

"Describe this lady."

"She was about five-foot-seven, sir, with dark hair and light blue eyes. She was wearing a grey coat and skirt and a hat worn very much to the back of the head instead of over the right eye."

"Mrs. Tanios," I ejaculated in a low voice.

"She seemed in a condition of great nervous excitement, sir. Said it was of the utmost importance she should find you quickly."

"What time was this?"

"About half-past ten, sir."

Poirot shook his head as he passed on towards the sitting-room.

"That is the second time I have missed hearing what Mrs. Tanios has to say. What would you say, Hastings? Is there a fate in it?"

"Third time lucky," I said consolingly.

Poirot shook his head doubtfully.

"Will there be a third time? I wonder. Come, let us hear what the husband has to say."

Dr. Tanios was sitting in an armchair reading one of Poirot's books on psychology. He sprang up and greeted us.

"You must forgive this intrusion. I hope you don't mind my foreing my way in and waiting for you like this."

"*Du tout, du tout.* Pray sit down. Permit me to offer you a glass of sherry."

"Thank you. As a matter of fact, I have an excuse. M. Poirot, I am worried, terribly worried about my wife."

"About your wife? I'm very sorry. What's the matter?"

Tanios said: "You have seen her perhaps, lately?"

It seemed quite a natural question, but the quick look that accompanied it was not so natural.

Poirot replied in the most matter-of-fact manner.

"No, not since I saw her at the hotel with you yesterday."

"Ah—I thought perhaps she might have called upon you." Poirot was busy pouring out three glasses of sherry.

He said in a slightly abstracted voice:

"No. Was there any—reason for her calling on me?"

"No, no." Dr. Tanios accepted his sherry. "Thank you. Thank you very much. No, there was no exact reason, but, to be frank, I am very much concerned about my wife's state of health."

"Ah, she is not strong?"

"Her bodily health," said Tanios slowly, "is good. I wish I could say the same for her mind."

"Ah?"

"I fear, M. Poirot, that she is on the verge of a complete nervous breakdown."

"My dear Dr. Tanios, I am extremely sorry to hear this."

"This condition has been growing for some time. During the last two months her manner towards me has completely changed. She is nervous, easily startled, and she has the oddest fancies—actually they are more than fancies—they are *delusions*!"

"Really?"

"Yes. She is suffering from what is commonly known as persecution mania—a fairly well-known condition."

Poirot made a sympathetic noise with his tongue.

"You can understand my anxiety!"

"Naturally. Naturally. But what I do not quite understand is why you have come to me. How can I help you?"

Dr. Tanios seemed a little embarrassed.

"It occurred to me that my wife might have—or may yet—come to you with some extraordinary tale. She may conceivably say that she is in danger from me—something of that kind."

"But why should she come to *me*?"

Dr. Tanios smiled—it was a charming smile—genial yet wistful.

"You are a celebrated detective, M. Poirot. I saw—I could see at once—that my wife was very impressed at meeting you yesterday. The mere fact of meeting a detective would make a powerful impression on her in her present state. It seems to me highly probable that she might seek you out and—and—well, confide in you. That is the way these nervous affections go! There is a tendency to turn against those nearest and dearest to you."

"Very distressing."

"Yes, indeed. I am very fond of my wife." There was a rich tenderness in his voice. "I always feel it was so brave of her to marry me—a man of another race—to come out to a far country—to leave all her own friends and surroundings. For the last few days I have been really distraught... I can see only one thing for it..."

"Yes?"

"Perfect rest and quiet—and suitable psychological treatment. There is a splendid home I know of run by a first-class man. I want to take her down there—it is in Norfolk—straight away. Perfect rest and isolation from outside influence—that is what is needed. I feel convinced that once she has been there a month or two under skilled treatment there will be a change for the better."

"I see," said Poirot.

He uttered the words in a matter-of-fact manner without any clue to the feelings that prompted him.

Tanios again shot a quick glance at him.

"That is why, if she should come to you, I should be obliged if you will let me know at once."

"But certainly. I will telephone you. You are at the Durham Hotel still?"

"Yes. I am going back there now."

"And your wife is not there?"

"She went out directly after breakfast."

"Without telling you where she was going?"

"Without saying a word. That is most unlike her."

"And the children?"

"She took them with her."

"I see."

Tanios got up.

"Thank you so much, M. Poirot. I need hardly say that if she does tell you any high-flown stories of intimidation and persecution, pay no attention to them. It is, unfortunately, a part of her malady."

"Most distressing," said Poirot with sympathy.

"It is indeed. Although one knows, medically speaking, that it is part of a recognized mental disease, yet one cannot help being hurt when a person very near and dear to you turns against you and all their affection changes to dislike."

"You have my deepest sympathy," said Poirot as he shook hands with his guest.

"By the way—" Poirot's voice recalled Tanios just as he was at the door.

"Yes?"

"Do you ever prescribe chloral for your wife?"

Tanios gave a startled movement.

"I—no—at least I may have done. But not lately. She seems to have taken an aversion to any form of sleeping-draught."

"Ah! I suppose because she does not trust you?"

"M. Poirot!"

Tanios came striding forward angrily.

"That would be part of the disease," said Poirot smoothly.

Tanios stopped.

"Yes, yes, of course."

"She is probably highly suspicious of anything you give her to eat or drink. Probably suspects you of wanting to poison her?"

"Dear me, M. Poirot, you are quite right. You know something of such cases, then?"

"One comes across them now and then in my profession, naturally. But do not let me detain you. You may find her waiting for you at the hotel."

"True. I hope I shall. I feel terribly anxious."

He hurried out of the room.

Poirot went swiftly to the telephone. He flicked over the pages of the telephone directory and asked for a number.

"'Allo—'allo—is that the Durham Hotel? Can you tell me if Mrs. Tanios is in? What? T-A-N-I-O-S. Yes, that is right. Yes? Yes? Oh, I see."

He replaced the receiver.

"Mrs. Tanios left the hotel this morning early. She returned at eleven, waited in the taxi whilst her luggage was brought down and drove away with it."

"Does Tanios know she took away her luggage?"

"I think not as yet."

"Where has she gone?"

"Impossible to tell."

"Do you think she will come back here?"

"Possibly. I cannot tell."

"Perhaps she will write."

"Perhaps."

"What can we do?"

Poirot shook his head. He looked worried and distressed.

"Nothing at the moment. A hasty lunch and then we will go and see Theresa Arundell."

"Do you believe it was her on the stairs?"

"Impossible to tell. One thing I made sure of—Miss Lawson could not have seen her face. She saw a tall figure in a dark dressing-gown, that is all."

"And the brooch?"

"My dear friend, a brooch is not a part of—"

anatomy! It can be detached from that person. It can be lost—or borrowed—or even stolen."

"In other words, you don't want to believe Theresa Arundell guilty?"

"I want to hear what she has to say on the matter."

"And if Mrs. Tanios comes back?"

"I will arrange for that."

George brought in an omelette.

"Listen, George," said Poirot. "If that lady comes back, you will ask her to wait. If Dr. Tanios comes while she is here, on no account let him in. If he asks if his wife is here, you will tell him she is not. You understand?"

"Perfectly, sir."

Poirot attacked the omelette.

"This business complicates itself," he said. "We must step very carefully. If not—the murderer will strike again."

"If he did you might get him."

"Quite possibly, but I prefer the life of the innocent to the conviction of the guilty. We must go very, very carefully."

CHAPTER XXIV

Theresa's Denial

We found Theresa Arundell just preparing to go out. She was looking extraordinarily attractive. A small hat of the most outrageous fashion descended rakishly over one eye. I recognized with momentary amusement that Bella Tanios had worn a cheap imitation of such a hat yesterday and had worn it—as George had put it—on the back of the head instead of over the right eye. I remembered well how she had pushed it further and further back on her untidy hair.

Poirot said politely :

"Can I have just a minute or two, mademoiselle, or will it delay you too much?"

Theresa laughed. "Oh, it doesn't matter. I'm always three-quarters of an hour late for everything. I might just as well make it an hour."

She led him into the sitting-room. To my surprise Dr. Donaldson rose from a chair by the window.

"You've met M. Poirot already, Rex, haven't you?"

"We met at Market Basing," said Donaldson stiffly.

"You were pretending to write the life of my drunken grandfather, I understand," said Theresa. "Rex, my angel, will you leave us?"

"Thank you, Theresa, but I think that from every point of view it would be advisable for me to be present at this interview."

There was a brief duel of eyes. Theresa's were commanding. Donaldson's were impervious. She showed a quick flash of anger.

"All right, stay then, damn you!"

Mr. Donaldson seemed unperturbed.

He seated himself again in the chair by the window, laying down his book on the arm of it. It was a book on the pituitary gland, I noticed.

Theresa sat down on her favourite low stool and looked impatiently at Poirot.

"Well, you've seen Purvis? What about it?"

Poirot said in a non-committal voice :

"There are—possibilities, mademoiselle."

She looked at him thoughtfully. Then she sent a very faint glance in the direction of the doctor. It was, I think, intended as a warning to Poirot.

"But it would be well, I think," went on Poirot, "for me to report later when my plans are more advanced."

A faint smile showed for a minute on Theresa's face.

Poirot continued :

"I have to-day come from Market Basing and while there I have talked to Miss Lawson. Tell me, mademoiselle, did you on the night of April 13th (that was the night of the Easter Bank Holiday) kneel upon the stairs after every one had gone to bed?"

"My dear Hercule Poirot, what an extraordinary question. Why should I?"

"The question, mademoiselle, is not why you *should*, but whether you *did*."

"I'm sure I don't know. I should think it most unlikely."

"You comprehend, mademoiselle, Miss Lawson *says* you *did*."

Theresa shrugged her attractive shoulders.

"Does it matter?"

"It matters very much."

She stared at him in a perfectly amiable fashion. Poirot stared back.

"Loopy!" said Theresa.

"Pardon?"

"Definitely loopy!" said Theresa. "Don't you think so, Rex?"

Dr. Donaldson coughed.

"Excuse me, M. Poirot, but what is the point of the question?"

My friend spread out his hands.

"It is most simple! Some one drove in a nail in a convenient position at the head of the stairs. The nail was just touched with brown varnish to match the skirting-board."

"Is this a new kind of witchcraft?" asked Theresa.

"No, mademoiselle, it is much more homely and simple than that. On the following evening, the Tuesday, *some one* attached a string or thread from the nail to the balusters with the result that when Miss Arundell came out of her room she caught her foot in it and went head-long down the stairs."

Theresa drew in her breath sharply.

"That was Bob's ball!"

"Pardon, it was not."

There was a pause. It was broken by Donaldson, who said in his quiet, precise voice :

"Excuse me, but what evidence have you in support of this statement?"

Poirot said quietly :

"The evidence of the nail, the evidence of Miss Arundell's own written words, and finally the evidence of Miss Lawson's eyes."

Theresa found her voice.

"She says *I* did it, does she?"

Poirot did not answer except by bending his head a little.

"Well, it's a lie! I had nothing to do with it!"

"You were kneeling on the stairs for quite another reason?"

"I wasn't kneeling on the stairs at all!"

"Be careful, mademoiselle."

"I wasn't there! I never came out of my room after I went to bed on any evening I was there."

"Miss Lawson recognized you."

"It was probably Bella Tanios or one of the maids she saw."

"She says it was you."

"She's a damned liar!"

"She recognized your dressing-gown and a brooch you wear."

"A brooch—what brooch?"

"A brooch with your initials."

"Oh, I know the one! What a circumstantial liar she is!"

"You still deny that it was you she saw?"

"If it's my word against hers—"

"You are a better liar than she is—eh?"

Theresa said calmly:

"That's probably quite true. But in this case I'm speaking the truth. I wasn't preparing a booby trap or saying my prayers, or picking up gold or silver, or doing anything at all on the stairs."

"Have you this brooch that was mentioned?"

"Probably. Do you want to see it?"

"If you please, mademoiselle."

Theresa got up and left the room. There was an awkward silence. Dr. Donaldson looked at Poirot much as I imagined he might have looked at an anatomical specimen.

Theresa returned. "Here it is."

She almost flung the ornament at Poirot. It was a large rather showy chromium or stainless steel brooch

with T. A. enclosed in a circle. I had to admit that it was large enough and showy enough to be easily seen in Miss Lawson's mirror.

"I never wear it now. I'm tired of it," said Theresa. "London's been flooded with them. Every little skivvy wears one."

"But it was expensive when you bought it?"

"Oh, yes.—They were quite exclusive to begin with."

"When was that?"

"Last Christmas, I think it was. Yes, about then."

"Have you ever lent it to any one?"

"No."

"You had it with you at Littlegreen House?"

"I suppose I did. Yes, I did. I remember."

"Did you leave it about at all? Was it out of your possession while you were there?"

"No, it wasn't. I wore it on a green jumper, I remember. And I wore the same jumper every day."

"And at night?"

"It was still in the jumper."

"And the jumper?"

"Oh, hell, the jumper was sitting on a chair."

"You are sure no one removed the brooch and put it back again the next day?"

"We'll say so in court if you like—if you think that's the best lie to tell! Actually I'm *quite sure* that nothing like that happened! It's a pretty idea that somebody framed me—but I don't think it's true."

Poirot frowned. Then he got up, attached the brooch carefully to his coat lapel and approached a mirror on a table at the other end of the room. He stood in front of it and then moved slowly backward, getting an effect of distance.

Then he uttered a grunt.

"Imbecile that I am! Of course!"

He came back and handed the brooch to Theresa with a bow.

"You are quite right, mademoiselle. The brooch did *not* leave your possession! I have been regrettably dense."

"I do like modesty," said Theresa, pinning the brooch on carelessly.

She looked up at him.

"Anything more? I ought to be going."

"Nothing that cannot be discussed later."

Theresa moved towards the door. Poirot went on in a quiet voice :

"There is a question of exhumation, it is true—"

Theresa stopped dead. The brooch fell from her hand to the ground.

"What's that?"

Poirot said clearly :

"It is possible that the body of Miss Emily Arundell may be exhumed."

Theresa stood still, her hands clenched. She said in a low, angry voice :

"Is this *your* doing? It can't be done without an application from the family!"

"You are wrong, mademoiselle. It can be done on an order from the Home Office."

"My God!" said Theresa.

She turned and walked swiftly up and down.

Donaldson said quietly :

"I really don't see that there is any need to be so upset, Tessa. I dare say that to an outsider the idea is not very pleasant, but—"

She interrupted him.

"Don't be a fool, Rex!"

Poirot asked :

"The idea disturbs you, mademoiselle?"

"Of course it does! It isn't decent. Poor old Aunt Emily. Why the devil *should* she be exhumed?"

"I presume," said Donaldson, "that there is some doubt as to the cause of death?" He looked inquiringly at Poirot. He went on. "I confess that I am surprised. I think that there is no doubt that Miss Arundell died a natural death from a disease of long standing."

"You told me something about a rabbit and liver trouble once," said Theresa. "I've forgotten it now, but you infect a rabbit with blood from a person with yellow

atrophy of the liver, and then you inject that rabbit's blood into another rabbit, and then that second rabbit's blood into a person and the person gets a diseased liver. Something like that."

"That was merely an illustration of serum therapeutics," said Donaldson patiently.

"Pity there are so many rabbits in the story!" said Theresa with a reckless laugh. "None of us keep rabbits." She turned on Poirot and her voice altered.

"M. Poirot, is this *true*?" she asked.

"It is true enough, but—there are ways of avoiding such a contingency, mademoiselle."

"Then avoid it!" Her voice sank almost to a whisper. It was urgent, compelling. "Avoid it *at all costs*!"

Poirot rose to his feet.

"Those are your instructions?" His voice was formal.

"Those are my instructions."

"But, Tessa—" Donaldson interrupted.

She whirled round on her fiancé.

"Be quiet! She was *my* aunt, wasn't she? Why should *my* aunt be dug up? Don't you know there will be paragraphs in the papers and gossip and general unpleasantness?" She swung round again on Poirot.

"You must stop it! I give you *carte blanche*. Do anything you like, but *stop it*!"

Poirot bowed formally.

"I will do what I can. *Au revoir, mademoiselle, au revoir, Doctor.*"

"Oh, go away!" cried Theresa. "And take St. Leonards with you. I wish I'd never set eyes on either of you."

We left the room. Poirot did not this time deliberately place his ear to the crack, but he dallied—yes, he dallied.

And not in vain. Theresa's voice rose clear and defiant: "Don't look at me like that, Rex."

And then suddenly, with a break in her voice: "Darling."

Dr. Donaldson's precise voice answered her.

He said very clearly :

"That man means mischief."

Poirot grinned suddenly. He drew me through the front door.

"Come, St. Leonards," he said. "*C'est drôle, ça!*"

Personally I thought the joke a particularly stupid one.

CHAPTER XXV

I Lie back and Reflect

No, I thought, as I hurried after Poirot, there was no doubt about it now. Miss Arundell had been murdered and Theresa knew it. But was she herself the criminal or was there another explanation?

She was afraid—yes. But was she afraid for herself or for some one else? Could that some one be the quiet, precise young doctor with the calm, aloof manner?

Had the old lady died of genuine disease *artificially induced*?

Up to a point it all fitted in—Donaldson's ambitions, his belief that Theresa would inherit money at her aunt's death. Even the fact that he had been at dinner there on the evening of the accident. How easy to leave a convenient window open and return in the dead of night to tie the murderous thread across the staircase. But then, what about the placing of the nail in position?

No, Theresa must have done that. Theresa, his fiancée and accomplice. With the two of them working it together, the whole thing seemed clear enough. In that case it was probably Theresa who had actually placed the thread in position. The *first* crime, the crime that failed, had been *her* work. The second crime, the crime that had succeeded, was Donaldson's more scientific masterpiece.

Yes—it all fitted in.

Yet even now there were loose strands. Why had Theresa blurted out those facts about inducing liver disease

in human beings? It was almost as though she did not realize the truth.... But in that case—and I felt my mind growing bewildered, and I interrupted my speculations to ask :

"Where are we going, Poirot?"

"Back to my flat. It is possible that we may find Mrs. Tanios there."

My thoughts switched off on a different track.

Mrs. Tanios! That was another mystery! If Donaldson and Theresa were guilty, where did Mrs. Tanios and her smiling husband come in? What did the woman want to tell Poirot and what was Tanios's anxiety to prevent her doing so?

"Poirot," I said humbly, "I'm getting rather muddled. They're not *all* in it, are they?"

"Murder by a syndicate? A family syndicate? No, not this time. There is the mark of one brain and one brain only in this. The psychology is very clear."

"You mean that either Theresa or Donaldson did it—but not *both* of them? Did he get her to hammer that nail in on some entirely innocent pretext, then?"

"My dear friend, from the moment I heard Miss Lawson's story I realized that there were three possibilities : (1) That Miss Lawson was telling the exact truth. (2) That Miss Lawson had invented the story for reasons of her own. (3) That Miss Lawson actually believed her own story, but that her identification rested upon the brooch—and as I have already pointed out to you—a brooch is easily detachable from its owner."

"Yes, but Theresa insists that the brooch did not leave her possession."

"And she is perfectly right. I had overlooked a small but intensely significant fact."

"Very unlike you, Poirot," I said solemnly.

"*N'est-ce pas?* But one has one's lapses."

"Age will tell!"

"Age has nothing to do with it," said Poirot coldly.

"Well, what is the significant fact?" I asked as we turned in at the entrance of the Mansions.

"I will show you."

We had just reached the flat.

George opened the door to us. In reply to Poirot's anxious question he shook his head.

"No, sir, Mrs. Tanios has not called. Neither has she telephoned."

Poirot went into the sitting-room. He paced up and down for a few moments. Then he picked up the telephone. He got first on to the Durham Hotel.

"Yes—yes, please. Ah, Dr. Tanios, this is Hercule Poirot speaking. Your wife has returned? Oh, not returned. Dear me.... Taken her luggage you say.... And the children.... You have no idea where she has gone.... Yes, quite.... Oh, perfectly.... If my professional services are of any use to you? I have a certain experience in these matters.... Such things can be done quite discreetly.... No, of course not.... Yes, of course that is true.... Certainly—certainly. I shall respect your wishes in the matter."

He hung up the receiver thoughtfully.

"He does not know where she is," he said thoughtfully. "I think that is quite genuine. The anxiety in his voice is unmistakable. He does not want to go to the police; that is understandable. Yes, I understand that. He does not want my assistance either. That is, perhaps, not quite so understandable.... He wants her found—but he does not want *me* to find her.... No, definitely he does not want me to find her... He seems confident that he can manage the matter himself. He does not think she can remain long hidden, for she has very little money with her. Also she has the children. Yes, I fancy he will be able to hunt her down rather long. But, I think, Hastings, that we shall be a little quicker than he is. It is important, I think, that we should be."

"Do you think it's true that she is ~~quite~~ ~~well~~?" I asked.

"I think that she is in a highly ~~normal~~ ~~condition~~ condition."

"But not to such a point ~~that she may be~~ ~~in~~ mental home?"

"That, very definitely, no."

"You know, Poirot, I don't quite understand all this."

"If you will pardon my saying so, Hastings, you do not understand at all!"

"There seem so many—well—side issues."

"Naturally there are side issues. To separate the main issue from the side issues is the first task of the orderly mind."

"Tell me, Poirot, have you realized all along that there were *eight* possible suspects and not seven?"

Poirot replied drily :

"I have taken that fact into consideration from the moment that Theresa Arundell mentioned that the last time she saw Dr. Donaldson was when he dined at Little-green House on April 14th."

"I can't quite see—" I broke off.

"What is it you cannot quite see?"

"Well, if Donaldson had planned to do away with Miss Arundell by scientific means—by inoculation, that is to say—I can't see why he resorted to such a clumsy device as a string across the stairs."

"*En vérité*, Hastings, there are moments when I lose patience with you! One method is a highly scientific one needing fully specialized knowledge. That is so, is it not?"

"Yes."

"And the other is a homely simple method—"the kind that mother makes"—as the advertisements say. Is that not right?"

"Yes, exactly."

"Then think, Hastings—*think*. Lie back in your chair, close the eyes, employ the little grey cells."

I obeyed. That is to say, I leant back in the chair and closed my eyes and endeavoured to carry out the third part of Poirot's instructions. The result, however, did not seem to clarify matters much.

I opened my eyes to find Poirot regarding me with the kindly attention a nurse might display towards a childish charge.

"*Eh bien?*"

I made a desperate attempt to emulate Poirot's manner. "Well," I said, "it seems to me that the kind of person who laid the original booby-trap is not the kind of person to plan out a scientific murder."

"Exactly."

"And I doubt if a mind trained to scientific complexities would think of anything so childish as the accident plan—it would be altogether too haphazard."

"Very clearly reasoned."

Emboldened, I went on :

"Therefore, the only logical solution seems to be this—the two attempts were planned by two different people. We have here to deal with murder attempted by two entirely different people."

"You do not think that is too much of a coincidence?"

"You said yourself once that one coincidence is nearly always found in a murder-case."

"Yes, that is true. I have to admit it."

"Well, then."

"And who do you suggest for your villains?"

"Donaldson and Theresa Arundell. A doctor is clearly indicated for the final and successful murder. On the other hand, we know that Theresa Arundell is concerned in the first attempt. I think it's possible that they acted quite independently of each other."

"You are so fond of saying 'we know,' Hastings. I can assure you that no matter what *you* know, I do not know that Theresa was implicated."

"But Miss Lawson's story."

"Miss Lawson's story is Miss Lawson's story. Just that."

"But she says—"

"She says—she says.... Always you are so ready to take what people say for a proved and accepted fact. Now listen, *mon cher*, I told you at the time, did I not, that something struck me as wrong about Miss Lawson's story?"

"Yes, I remember your saying so. But you couldn't get hold of what it was."

"Well, I have done so now. A little moment and I

will show you what I, imbecile that I am, ought to have seen at once."

He went over to the desk and opening a drawer took out a sheet of cardboard. He cut into this with a pair of scissors, motioning to me not to overlook what he was doing.

"Patience, Hastings, in a little moment we will proceed to our experiment."

I averted my eyes obligingly.

In a minute or two Poirot uttered an exclamation of satisfaction. He put away the scissors, dropped the fragments of cardboard into the waste-paper basket and came across the room to me.

"Now, do not look. Continue to avert the eyes while I pin something to the lapel of your coat."

I humoured him. Poirot completed the proceeding to his satisfaction, then, propelling me gently to my feet he drew me across the room, and into the adjoining bedroom.

"Now, Hastings, regard yourself in the glass. You are wearing, are you not, a fashionable brooch with your initials on it—only, *bien entendu*, the brooch is made not of chromium nor stainless steel, nor gold, nor platinum—but of humble cardboard!"

I looked at myself and smiled. Poirot is uncommonly neat with his fingers. I was wearing a very fair representation of Theresa Arundell's brooch—a circle cut out of cardboard and enclosing my initials—A.H.

"*Eh bien*," said Poirot. "You are satisfied? You have there, have you not, a very smart brooch with your initials?"

"A most handsome affair," I agreed.

"It is true it does not gleam and reflect the light, but all the same you are prepared to admit that that brooch could be seen plainly from some distance away?"

"I've never doubted it."

"Quite so. Doubt is not your strong point. Simple faith is more characteristic of you. And now, Hastings, be so good as to remove your coat."

Wondering a little, I did so. Poirot divested himself

of his own coat and slipped on mine, turning away a little as he did so.

"And now," said he. "Regard how the brooch—the brooch with *your* initials—becomes me?"

He whisked round. I stared at him—for the moment uncomprehendingly. Then I saw the point.

"What a blithering fool I am! Of course. It's H. A. in the brooch, not A. H. at all."

Poirot beamed on me, as he reassumed his own clothes and handed me mine.

"Exactly—and now you see what struck me as wrong with Miss Lawson's story. She stated that she had seen Theresa's initials clearly on the brooch she was wearing. But she saw Theresa in the *glass*. So, *if she saw the initials at all*, she must have seen them reversed."

"Well," I argued. "Perhaps she did, and realized that they were reversed."

"*Mon cher*, did that occur to you just now? Did you exclaim, 'Ha! Poirot, you've got it wrong—that's H. A. really—not A.H.'? No, you did not. And yet you are a good deal more intelligent, I should say, than Miss Lawson. Do not tell me that a muddle-headed woman like that woke up suddenly, and still half-asleep, realized that A. T. was really T. A. No, that is not at all consistent with the mentality of Miss Lawson."

"She was determined it should be Theresa," I said slowly.

"You are getting nearer, my friend. You remember, I hint to her that she could not really see the face of any one on the stairs, and immediately—what does she do?"

"Remembers Theresa's brooch and lugs that in—forgetting that the mere fact of having seen it in the glass gave her own story the lie."

The telephone bell rang sharply. Poirot crossed to it. He only spoke a few non-committal words.

"Yes? Yes... certainly. Yes, quite convenient. The afternoon, I think. Yes, two o'clock will do admirably."

He replaced the receiver and turned to me with a smile.

I would have advised her—but there, he isn't an Englishman... And she looks so peculiar, poor thing, so—well, so *scared*. What can he have been doing to her? I believe 'Turks are frightfully cruel sometimes."

"Dr. Tanios is a Greek."

"Yes, of course, that's the other way about—I mean, they're usually the ones who get massacred by the Turks—or am I thinking of Armenians? But all the same, I don't like to think of it. I don't think she *ought* to go back to him, do you, M. Poirot? Anyway, I mean, she says she won't.... She doesn't even want him to know where she is."

"As bad as that?"

"Yes, you see it's the *children*. She's so afraid he could take them back to Smyrna. Poor soul, she really is in a terrible way. You see, she's got no money—no money at all. She doesn't know where to go or what to do. She wants to try and earn her living, but, really, you know, M. Poirot, that's not so easy as it sounds. I know that. It's not as though she were *trained* for anything."

"When did she leave her husband?"

"Yesterday. She spent last night in a little hotel near Paddington. She came to me because she couldn't think of any one else to go to, poor thing."

"And are you going to help her? That is very good of you."

"Well, you see, M. Poirot, I really feel it's my *duty*. But, of course, it's all very difficult. This is a very small flat and there's no room—and what with one thing and another."

"You could send her to Littlegreen House?"

"I suppose I could—but you see her husband might think of that. Just for the moment I've got her rooms at the Wellington Hotel in Queen's Road. She's staying there under the name of Mrs. Peters."

"I see," said Poirot.

He paused for a minute, then said :

"I would like to see Mrs. Tanios. You see, she called at my flat yesterday but I was out."

"Oh, did she? She didn't tell me that. I'll tell her, shall I?"

"If you would be so good."

Miss Lawson hurried out of the room. We could hear her voice.

"Bella—Bella—my dear, will you come and see M. Poirot?"

We did not hear Mrs. Tanios's reply, but a minute or two later she came into the room.

I was really shocked at her appearance. There were dark circles under her eyes and her cheeks were completely destitute of colour, but what struck me far more than this was her obvious air of terror. She started at the least provocation, and she seemed to be continually listening.

Poirot greeted her in his most soothing manner. He came forward, shook hands, arranged a chair for her and handed her a cushion. He treated the pale, frightened woman as though she had been a queen.

"And now, madame, let us have a little chat. You came to see me yesterday, I believe?"

She nodded.

"I regret very much that I was away from home."

"Yes—yes, I wish you had been there."

"You came because you wanted to tell me something?"

"Yes, I—I meant to—"

"*Eh bien*, I am here, at your service."

Mrs. Tanios did not respond. She sat quite still, twisting a ring round and round on her finger.

"Well, madame?"

Slowly, almost reluctantly, she shook her head.

"No," she said. "I daren't."

"You *daren't*, madame?"

"No. I—if he knew—he'd—oh, something would happen to me!"

"Come, come, madame—that is absurd."

"Oh, but it isn't absurd—it isn't absurd at all. You don't know him..."

"By *him*, you mean your husband, madame?"

"Yes, of course."

Poirot was silent a minute or two, then he said :

"Your husband came to see me yesterday, madame."

A quick look of alarm sprang up in her face.

"Oh, no! You didn't tell him—but of course you didn't! You couldn't. You didn't know where I was. Did he—did he say I was *mad*?"

Poirot answered cautiously.

"He said that you were—highly nervous."

But she shook her head, undeceived.

"No, he said that I was mad—or that I was going mad! He wants to shut me up so that I shan't be able to tell any one ever."

"Tell any one—what?"

But she shook her head. Twisting her fingers nervously round and round, she muttered :

"I'm afraid..."

"But, madame, once you have *told* me—you are *safe*! The secret is out! The fact will protect you automatically."

But she did not reply. She went on twisting—twisting at her ring.

"You must see that yourself," said Poirot gently.

She gave a sort of gasp.

"How am I to know?... Oh, dear, it's terrible. He's so *plausible*! And he's a doctor! People will believe him and not me. I know they will. I should myself. Nobody will believe me. How could they?"

"You will not even give me the chance?"

She shot a troubled glance at him.

"How do I know? You may be on his side."

"I am on no one's side, madame. I am—always—on the side of the truth."

"I don't know," said Mrs. Tanios hopelessly. "Oh, I don't know."

She went on, her words gathering volume, tumbling over each other.

"It's been so awful—for years now. I've seen things happening again and again. And I couldn't say anything or do anything. There have been the children. It's been like a long nightmare. And now this.... But I

won't go back to him. I won't let him have the children! I'll go somewhere where he can't find me. Minnie Lawson will help me. She's been so kind—so wonderfully kind. Nobody could have been kinder." She stopped, then shot a quick look at Poirot and asked :

"What did he say about me? Did he say I had delusions?"

"He said, madame, that you had—changed towards him."

She nodded.

"And he said I had delusions. He *did* say that, didn't he?"

"Yes, madame, to be frank, he did."

"That's it, you see. That's what it will sound like. And I've no proof—no real proof."

Poirot leaned back in his chair. When he next spoke it was with an entire change of manner.

He spoke in a matter-of-fact, business-like voice with as little emotion as if he had been discussing some dry matter of business.

"Do you suspect your husband of doing away with Miss Emily Arundell?"

Her answer came quickly—a spontaneous flash.

"I don't suspect—I know."

"Then, madame, it is your duty to speak."

"Ah, but it isn't so easy—no, it isn't so easy."

"How did he kill her?"

"I don't know exactly—but he did kill her."

"But you don't know the method he employed?"

"No—it was something he did that last Sunday."

"The Sunday he went down to see her?"

"Yes."

"But you don't know what it was?"

"No."

"Then how, forgive me, madame, can you be so sure?"

"Because he—" She stopped and said slowly, "I *am* sure!"

"Pardon, madame, but there is something you are keeping back. Something you have not yet told me?"

"Yes."

"Come, then."

Bella Tanios got up suddenly.

"No. No. I can't do that. The children. Their father. I can't. I simply can't...."

"But, madame—"

"I can't, I tell you."

Her voice rose almost to a scream. The door opened and Miss Lawson came in, her head cocked on one side with a sort of pleasurable excitement.

"May I come in? Have you had your little talk? Bella, my dear, don't you think you ought to have a cup of tea, or some soup, or perhaps a little brandy even?"

Mrs. Tanios shook her head.

"I'm quite all right." She gave a weak smile. "I must be getting back to the children. I have left them to unpack."

"Dear little things," said Miss Lawson. "I'm so fond of children."

Mrs. Tanios turned to her suddenly.

"I don't know what I should do without you," she said. "You—you've been wonderfully kind."

"There, there, my dear, don't cry. Everything's going to be all right. You shall come round and see my lawyer—such a nice man, so sympathetic, and he'll advise you the best way to get a divorce. Divorce is so simple nowadays, isn't it, everybody says so. Oh, dear, there's the bell. I wonder who that is."

She left the room hurriedly. There was a murmur of voices in the hall. Miss Lawson reappeared. She tiptoed in and shut the door carefully behind her. She spoke in an excited whisper, mouthing the words exaggeratedly.

"Oh, dear, Bella, it's your husband. I'm sure I don't know—"

Mrs. Tanios gave one bound towards a door at the other end of the room. Miss Lawson nodded her head violently.

"That's right, dear, go in there, and then you can slip out when I've brought him in here."

Mrs. Tanios whispered :

"Don't say I've been here. Don't say you've seen me."

"No, no, of course I won't."

Mrs. Tanios slipped through the door. Poirot and I followed hastily. We found ourselves in a small dining-room.

Poirot crossed to the door into the hall, opened it a crack and listened. Then he beckoned.

"All is clear. Miss Lawson has taken him into the other room."

We crept through the hall and out by the front door. Poirot drew it to as noiselessly as possible after him.

Mrs. Tanios began to run down the steps, stumbling and clutching at the banisters. Poirot steadied her with a hand under her arm.

"*Du calme—du calme.* All is well."

We reached the entrance-hall.

"Come with me," said Mrs. Tanios piteously. She looked as though she might be going to faint.

"Certainly I will come," said Poirot reassuringly.

We crossed the road, turned a corner, and found ourselves in the Queen's Road. The Wellington was a small, inconspicuous hotel of the boarding-house variety.

When we were inside, Mrs. Tanios sank down on a plush sofa. Her hand was on her beating heart.

Poirot patted her reassuringly on the shoulder.

"It was the narrow squeak—yes. Now, madame, you are to listen to me very carefully."

"I can't tell you anything more, M. Poirot. It wouldn't be right. You—you know what I think—what I believe. You—you must be satisfied with that."

"I asked you to listen, madame. Supposing—this is a supposition only—that *I already know the facts of the case.* Supposing that what you could tell me *I have already guessed*—that would make a difference, would it not?"....

She looked at him doubtfully. Her eyes were painful in their intensity.

"Oh, believe me, madame, I am not trying to trap you into saying what you do not wish to. But it *would* make a difference—yes?"

"I—I suppose it would."

"Good. Then let me say this. I, *Hercule Poirot*, know the truth. I am not going to ask you to accept my word for it. Take this." He thrust upon her the bulky envelope I had seen him seal up that morning. "The facts are there. After you have read them, if they satisfy you, ring me up. My number is on the note-paper."

Almost reluctantly she accepted the envelope.

Poirot went on briskly :

"And now, one more point, you must leave this hotel at once."

"But why?"

"You will go to the Coniston Hotel near Euston. Tell no one where you are going."

"But surely—here—Minnie Lawson won't tell my husband where I am."

"You think not?"

"Oh, no—she's entirely on my side."

"Yes, but your husband, madame, is a very clever man. He will not find it difficult to turn a middle-aged lady inside out. It is essential—*essential*, you understand, that your husband should not know where you are."

She nodded dumbly.

Poirot held out a sheet of paper.

"Here is the address. Pack up and drive there with the children as soon as possible. You understand?"

She nodded.

"I understand."

"It is the children you must think of, madame, not yourself. You love your children."

He had touched the right note.

A little colour crept into her cheeks, her head went back. She looked, not a frightened drudge, but an arrogant, almost handsome woman.

"It is arranged, then," said Poirot.

He shook hands and he and I departed. But not far. From the shelter of a convenient café, we sipped coffee and watched the entrance of the hotel. In about five minutes we saw Dr. Tanios walking down the street.

He did not even glance up at the Wellington. He passed it, his head bowed in thought, then he turned into the Underground station.

About ten minutes later we saw Mrs. Tanios and the children get into the taxi with their luggage and drive away.

"*Bien*," said Poirot, rising with the bill in his hand. "We have done our part. Now it is on the knees of the gods."

CHAPTER XXVII

Visit of Dr. Donaldson

Donaldson arrived punctually at two o'clock. He was as calm and precise as ever.

The personality of Donaldson had begun to intrigue me. I had started by regarding him as a rather nondescript young man. I had wondered what a vivid, compelling creature like Theresa could see in him. But I now began to realize that Donaldson was anything but negligible. Behind that pedantic manner there was ~~something~~ ^{more}.

After our preliminary greetings were over, Donaldson said :

"The reason for my visit is this. I am at a loss to understand exactly what your position is in this matter, M. Poirot."

Poirot replied guardedly :

"You know my profession, I think?"

"Certainly. I may say that I have ~~been~~ ^{been} ~~able~~ ^{been} to make inquiries about you."

"You are a careful man, Doctor."

Donaldson said drily :

"I like to be sure of my facts."

"You have the scientific mind?"

"I may say that all reports on you are the same. You are obviously a very clever man in your profession. You have also the reputation of being a ~~strong~~ ^{strong} ~~and~~ ^{and} ~~hard~~ ^{hard} one."

"You are too flattering," murmured Poirot.

"That is why I am at a loss to explain your connection with this affair."

"And yet it is so simple!"

"Hardly that," said Donaldson. "You first present yourself as a writer of biographies."

"A pardonable deception, do you not think? One cannot go everywhere announcing the fact that one is a detective—though that, too, has its uses sometimes."

"So I should imagine." Again Donaldson's tone was dry. "Your next proceeding," he went on, "was to call on Miss Theresa Arundell and represent to her that her aunt's will might conceivably be set aside."

Poirot merely bowed his head in assent.

"That, of course, was ridiculous" Donaldson's voice was sharp. "You knew perfectly well that that will was valid in law and that nothing could be done about it."

"You think that is the case?"

"I am not a fool, M. Poirot—"

"No, Dr. Donaldson, you are certainly not a fool."

"I know something—not very much, but enough—of the law. That will can certainly not be upset. Why did you pretend it could? Clearly for reasons of your own—reasons which Miss Theresa Arundell did not for a moment grasp."

"You seem very certain of her reactions."

A very faint smile passed across the young man's face.

He said unexpectedly :

"I know a good deal more about Theresa than she suspects. I have no doubt that she and Charles think they have enlisted your aid in some questionable business. Charles is almost completely amoral. Theresa has a bad heredity and her upbringing has been unfortunate."

"It is thus you speak of your fiancée—as though she was a guinea-pig?"

Donaldson peered at him through his pince-nez.

"I see no occasion to blink the truth. I love Theresa Arundell and I love her for what she is and not for any imagined qualities."

"Do you realize that Theresa Arundell is devoted to

you and that her wish for money is mainly in order that your ambitions should be gratified?"

"Of course I realize it. I've already told you I'm not a fool. But I have no intention of allowing Theresa to embroil herself in any questionable situation on my account. In many ways Theresa is a child still. I am quite capable of furthering my career by my own efforts. I do not say that a substantial legacy would not have been acceptable. It would have been most acceptable. But it would merely have provided a short cut."

"You have, in fact, full confidence in your own abilities?"

"It probably sounds conceited, but I have," said Donaldson composedly.

"Let us proceed, then. I admit that I gained Miss Theresa's confidence by a trick. I let her think that I would be—shall we say, reasonably dishonest—for money. She believed that without the least difficulty."

"Theresa believes that any one would do anything for money," said the young doctor in the same tone one uses when stating a self-evident truth.

"True. That seems to be her attitude—her attitude also."

"Charles probably would do anything for money."

"You have no illusions, I see, about your future in-law."

"No. I find him quite an interesting study. There is, I think, some deep-seated neurosis—~~but that is a long~~ shop. To return to what we are discussing—~~I have~~ asked myself why you should act in the way you have done, and I have found only one answer. It is clear that you suspect either Theresa or Charles of having a hand in Miss Arundell's death. No, please don't bother to contradict me! Your mention of estimation was I think, a mere device to see what reaction you would get. Have you, in actual fact, taken any steps towards getting a Home Office order for estimation?"

"I will be quite frank with you. As yet, I have not." Donaldson nodded.

"So I thought. I suppose you have confidence in

possibility that Miss Arundell's death may turn out to be from natural causes?"

"I have considered the fact that it may appear to be so—yes."

"But your own mind is made up?"

"Very definitely. If you have a case of—say—tuberculosis that looks like tuberculosis, behaves like tuberculosis, and in which the blood gives a positive reaction—*eh bien*, you consider it is tuberculosis, do you not?"

"You look at it that way? I see. Then what exactly are you waiting for?"

"I am waiting for a final piece of evidence."

The telephone bell rang. At a gesture from Poirot I got up and answered it. I recognized the voice.

"Captain Hastings? This is Mrs. Tanios speaking. Will you tell M. Poirot that he is perfectly right. If he will come here to-morrow morning at ten o'clock, I will give him what he wants."

"At ten o'clock to-morrow?"

"Yes."

"Right. I'll tell him."

Poirot's eyes asked a question. I nodded.

He turned to Donaldson. His manner had changed. It was brisk—assured.

"Let me make myself clear," he said. "I have diagnosed this case of mine as a case of murder. It looked like murder, it gave all the characteristic reactions of murder—in fact, it *was* murder! Of that, there is not the least doubt."

"Where then does the doubt—for I perceive there is a doubt—lie?"

"The doubt lay in *the identity of the murderer*—but that is a doubt no longer!"

"Really? You know?"

"Let us say that I shall have definite proof in my hands to-morrow."

Dr. Donaldson's eyebrows rose in a slightly ironical fashion.

"Ah," he said. "To-morrow! Sometimes, M. Poirot, to-morrow is a long way off."

"On the contrary," said Poirot, "I always find that it succeeds to-day with monotonous regularity."

Donaldson smiled. He rose.

"I fear I have wasted your time, M. Poirot."

"Not at all. It is always as well to understand each other." With a slight bow, Dr. Donaldson left the room.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Another Victim

"That is a clever man," said Poirot thoughtfully.

"It's rather difficult to know what he is driving at."

"Yes. He is a little inhuman. But extremely perceptive."

"That telephone call was from Mrs. Tanios."

"So I gathered."

I repeated the message. Poirot nodded approval.

"Good. All marches well. Twenty-four hours, Hastings, and I think we shall know exactly where we stand."

"I'm still a little fogged. Who exactly do we suspect?"

"I really could not say who *you* suspect, Hastings! Everybody in turn, I should imagine!"

"Sometimes I think you *like* to get me into that state!"

"No, no. I would not amuse myself in such a way."

"I wouldn't put it past you."

Poirot shook his head, but somewhat absently. I studied him.

"Is anything the matter?" I asked.

"My friend, I am always nervous towards the end of a case. If anything should go wrong—"

"Is anything likely to go wrong?"

"I do not think so." He paused, frowning. "I have, I think, provided against every contingency."

"Then, supposing that we forget crime and go to a show?"

"*Ma foi*, Hastings, that is a good idea."

We passed a very pleasant evening, though I made the

slight mistake of taking Poirot to a crook play. There is one piece of advice I offer to all my readers. Never take a soldier to a military play, a sailor to a naval play, a Scotsman to a Scottish play, a detective to a thriller—and an actor to any play whatsoever! The shower of destructive criticism in each case is somewhat devastating. Poirot never ceased to complain of faulty psychology, and the hero detective's lack of order and method nearly drove him demented. We parted that night with Poirot still explaining how the whole business might have been laid bare in the first half of the first act.

"But in that case, Poirot, there would have been no play," I pointed out.

Poirot was forced to admit that perhaps that was so. It was a few minutes past nine when I entered the sitting-room the next morning. Poirot was at the breakfast-table—as usual neatly sitting open his letters.

The telephone rang and I answered it.

A heavy-breathing female voice spoke :

"Is that M. Poirot? Oh, it's you, Captain Hastings."

There was a sort of gasp and a sob.

"Is that Miss Lawson?" I asked.

"Yes, yes, such a terrible thing has happened!"

I grasped the receiver tightly.

"What is it?"

"She left the Wellington, you know—Bella, I mean. I went there late in the afternoon yesterday and they said she'd left. Without a word to me, either! *Most* extraordinary! It makes me feel that perhaps, after all, Dr. Tanios was *right*. He spoke so *nicely* about her and seemed so *distressed*, and now it really looks as though he were right after all."

"But what's happened, Miss Lawson? Is it just that Mrs. Tanios left the hotel without telling you?"

"Oh, no; it's not *that*! Oh, dear me, no. If that were all it would be *quite* all right. Though I do think it was *odd*, you know. Dr. Tanios did say that he was afraid she wasn't quite—not *quite*—if you know what I mean. Persecution mania, he called it."

"Yes." (Damn the woman!) "But what's *happened*?"

"Oh, dear—it is terrible. Died in her sleep. An overdose of some sleeping stuff! And those *poor* little children! It all seems so dreadfully *sad*! I've done nothing but cry since I heard."

"How did you hear? Tell me all about it."

Out of the tail of my eye I noticed that Poirot had stopped opening his letters. He was listening to my side of the conversation. I did not like to cede my place to him. If I did it seemed highly probable that Miss Lawson would start with lamentations all over again.

"They rang me up. From the hotel. The Coniston it's called. It seems they found my name and address in her bag. Oh, dear, M. Poirot—Captain Hastings, I mean—*isn't it terrible?* Those poor little children left motherless."

"Look here," I said. "Are you sure it's an accident? They didn't think it could be suicide?"

"Oh, what a *dreadful* idea, Captain Hastings! Oh, dear, I don't know, I'm sure. Do you think it could be? That would be *dreadful*! Of course she *did* seem very depressed. But she needn't have been. I mean there wouldn't have been any difficulty about *money*. I was going to *share* with her—indeed I was! Dear Miss Arundell would have wished it. I'm sure of that! It seems so awful to think of her taking her own life—but perhaps she didn't.... The hotel people seemed to think it was an accident."

"What did *she* take?"

"One of those sleeping things. Veronal, I think. No, chloral. Yes, that was it. Chloral. Oh, dear, Captain Hastings, do you think—"

Unceremoniously I banged down the receiver. I turned to Poirot.

"Mrs. Tanios—"

He raised a hand.

"Yes, yes, I know what you are going to say. She is dead, is she not?"

"Yes. Overdose of sleeping-draught. Chloral."

Poirot got up.

"Come, Hastings, we must go there *at once*."

"Is this what you feared—last night? When you said you were always nervous towards the end of a case?"

"I feared another death—yes."

Poirot's face was set and stern. We said very little as we drove towards Euston. Once or twice Poirot shook his head.

I said timidly :

"You don't think—? Could it be an accident?"

"No, Hastings—no. It was not an accident."

"How on earth did he find out where she had gone?"

Poirot only shook his head without replying.

The Coniston was an unsavoury-looking place quite near Euston station. Poirot, with his card, and a suddenly bullying manner, soon fought his way into the manager's office.

The facts were quite simple.

Mrs. Peters, as she had called herself, and her two children had arrived about half-past twelve. They had had lunch at one o'clock.

At four o'clock a man had arrived with a note for Mrs. Peters. The note had been sent up to her. A few minutes later she had come down with the two children and a suitcase. The children had then left with the visitor. Mrs. Peters had gone to the office and explained that she should only want the one room after all.

She had not appeared exceptionally distressed or upset, indeed she had seemed quite calm and collected. She had had dinner about seven-thirty and had gone to her room soon afterwards.

On calling her in the morning the chambermaid had found her dead.

A doctor had been sent for and had pronounced her to have been dead for some hours. An empty glass was found on the table by the bed. It seemed fairly obvious that she had taken a sleeping-draught, and, by mistake, taken an overdose. Chloral hydrate, the doctor said, was a somewhat uncertain drug. There were no indications of suicide. No letter had been left. Searching for means of notifying her relations, Miss Lawson's

name and address had been found and she had been communicated with by telephone.

Poirot asked if anything had been found in the way of letters or papers. The letter, for instance, brought by the man who had called for the children.

No papers of any kind had been found, the man said, but there was a pile of charred paper on the hearth.

Poirot nodded thoughtfully.

As far as any one could say, Mrs. Peters had had no visitors and no one had come to her room—with the solitary exception of the man who had called for the two children.

I questioned the porter myself as to his appearance, but the man was very vague. A man of medium height—he thought fair-haired—rather military build—of somewhat nondescript appearance. No, he was positive the man had no beard.

"It wasn't Tanios," I murmured to Poirot.

"My dear Hastings! Do you really believe that Mrs. Tanios, after all the trouble she was taking to get the children away from their father, would quite meekly hand them over to him without the least fuss or protest? Ah, that, no!"

"Then who was the man?"

"Clearly it was some one in whom Mrs. Tanios had confidence or rather it was some one sent by a third person in whom Mrs. Tanios had confidence."

"A man of medium height," I mused.

"You need hardly trouble yourself about his appearance, Hastings. I am quite sure that the man who actually called for the children was some quite unimportant personage. The real agent kept himself in the background!"

"And the note was from this third person?"

"Yes."

"Some one in whom Mrs. Tanios had confidence?"

"Obviously."

"And the note is now burnt?"

"Yes, she was instructed to burn it."

"What about that résumé of the case that you gave her?"

Poirot's face looked unusually grim.

"That, too, is burned. But that does not matter!"

"No?"

"No. For you see—it is all in the head of Hercule Poirot."

He took me by the arm.

"Come, Hastings, let us leave here. Our concern is not with the dead but with the living. It is with them I have to deal."

CHAPTER XXIX

Inquest at Littlegreen House

It was eleven o'clock the following morning.

Seven people were assembled at Littlegreen House. Hercule Poirot stood by the mantelpiece. Charles and Theresa Arundell were on the sofa, Charles on the arm of it with his hand on Theresa's shoulder. Dr. Tanios sat in a grandfather chair. His eyes were red-rimmed and he wore a black band round his arm.

On an upright chair by a round table sat the owner of the house, Miss Lawson. She, too, had red eyes. Her hair was even untidier than usual. Dr. Donaldson sat directly facing Poirot. His face was quite expressionless.

My interest quickened as I looked at each face in turn.

In the course of my association with Poirot I had assisted at many such a scene. A little company of people, all outwardly composed with well-bred masks for faces. And I had seen Poirot strip the mask from one face and show it for what it was—the face of a killer!

Yes, there was no doubt of it. *One of these people was a murderer!* But which? Even now I was not sure.

Poirot cleared his throat—a little pompously as was his habit—and began to speak.

"We are assembled here, ladies and gentlemen, to inquire into the death of Emily Arundell on the first of May last. There are four possibilities—that she died

naturally—that she died as the result of an accident—that she took her own life—or lastly that she met her death at the hands of some person known or unknown.

"No inquest was held at the time of her death, since it was assumed that she died from natural causes and a medical certificate to that effect was given by Dr Grainger.

"In a case where suspicion arises after burial has taken place it is usual to exhume the body of the person in question. There are reasons why I have not advocated that course. The chief of them is that my client would not have liked it."

It was Dr. Donaldson who interrupted. He said :

"Your client?"

Poirot turned to him. "My client is Miss Emily Arundell. I am acting for her. Her greatest desire was that there should be no scandal."

I will pass over the next ten minutes, since it would involve much needless repetition. Poirot told of the letter he had received, and producing it he read it aloud. He went on to explain the steps he had taken on coming to Market Basing, and of his discovery of the means taken to bring about the accident.

Then he paused, cleared his throat once more, and went on :

"I am now going to take you over the ground I travelled to get at the truth. I am going to show you what I believe to be a true reconstruction of the facts of the case.

"To begin with, it is necessary to picture exactly what passed in Miss Arundell's mind. That, I think, is fairly easy. She has a fall, her fall is supposed to be occasioned by a dog's ball, but *she herself knows better*. Lying there on her bed her active and shrewd mind goes over the circumstances of her fall and she comes to a very definite conclusion about it. Some one has deliberately tried to injure—perhaps to kill her.

"From that conclusion she passes to a consideration of who that person can be. There were *seven* people in the house—four guests, her companion and two servants. Of these seven people only one can be entirely

exonerated—since to that one person no advantage could accrue. She does not seriously suspect the two servants, both of whom have been with her for many years and whom she knows to be devoted to her. There remain, then, *four* persons, three of them members of her family, and one of them a connection by marriage. *Each of those four persons benefits, three directly, one indirectly, by her death.*

"She is in a difficult position, since she is a woman with a strong sense of family feeling. Essentially she is not one who wishes to wash the dirty linen in public, as the saying goes. On the other hand, she is not one to submit tamely to attempted murder!

"She takes her decision and writes to me. She also takes a further step. That further step was, I believe, actuated by two motives. One, I think, was a distant feeling of *spite* against her entire family! She suspected them all impartially, and she determined at all costs to score off them! The second and more reasoned motive was a wish to protect herself and a realization of how this could be accomplished. As you know, she wrote to her lawyer, Mr. Purvis, and directed him to draw up a will in favour of the one person in the house who, she felt convinced, could have had no hand in her accident.

"Now I may say that, from the terms of her letter to me and from her subsequent actions, I am quite sure that Miss Arundell passed from *indefinite* suspicion of four people to *definite* suspicion of *one* of those four. The whole tenor of her letter to me is an insistence that this business must be kept strictly private, since the honour of the family is involved.

"I think that, from a Victorian point of view, this means that a person of *her own name* was indicated—and preferably a *man*.

"If she had suspected Mrs. Tanios she would have been quite as anxious to secure her own safety, but not quite as concerned for the family honour. She might have felt much the same about Theresa Arundell, but not nearly as intensely as she would feel about Charles.

"Charles was an *Arundell*. He bore the family name. Her reasons for suspecting him ~~seem quite clear~~ begin with, she had no illusions about Charles. He could come near to disgracing the family name. But, is, she knew him to be not only a ~~disgrace~~ criminal! He had already forged her name on a check. After forgery—a step further—murder.

"Also she had had a somewhat ~~suspicious conversation~~ with him only two days before her husband had asked her for money and she had refused. And thereupon remarked—oh, ~~lightly enough~~—that she was going the right way to get ~~rich~~. To this, she had responded that she ~~could not~~ be too sure.' And two days later the ~~murder~~ takes place.

"It is hardly to be wondered at that ~~she~~ brooding over the occurrence, ~~she~~ came finally to the conclusion that it was Charles who had made an attempt upon her life.

"The sequence of events is ~~plainly~~ conversation with Charles. ~~He~~ then to me in great distress of mind. ~~He~~ lawyer. On the following ~~day~~ brings the will and she signs it.

"Charles and Theresa ~~married~~ during week-end and Miss ~~Arundell~~ took necessary steps to safeguard ~~her~~ the will. She not only ~~signed~~ it to him! ~~That~~ She is making it ~~quite clear~~ murder would bring him ~~nothing~~.

"She probably ~~thought~~ that information to ~~him~~. Why? I fancy that ~~he~~ guilty! He believed ~~that~~ had been made. ~~He~~ he had really ~~assumed~~ he had helped ~~him~~. Either the serious ~~murder~~

for his reluctance. He said nothing, hoping that his aunt would relent and change her mind.

"As far as Miss Arundell's state of mind was concerned I felt that I had reconstructed events with a fair amount of correctness. I had next to make up my mind if her suspicions were, in actual fact, justified.

"Just as she had done, I realized that my suspicions were limited to a narrow circle—seven people to be exact. Charles and Theresa Arundell, Dr. Tanios and Mrs. Tanios, the two servants, and Miss Lawson. There was an eighth person who had to be taken into account—namely, Dr. Donaldson, who dined there that night, but I did not learn of his presence until later.

"These seven persons that I was considering fell easily into two categories. Six of them stood to benefit in a greater or lesser degree by Miss Arundell's death. If any one of those six had committed the crime the reason was probably a plain matter of *gain*. The second category contained one person only—Miss Lawson. Miss Lawson did *not* stand to gain by Miss Arundell's death, but *as a result of the accident*, she did benefit considerably *later*!

"That meant that if Miss Lawson staged the so-called accident—"

"I never did anything of the kind!" Miss Lawson interrupted. "It's disgraceful! Standing up there and saying such things!"

"A little patience, mademoiselle. And be kind enough not to interrupt," said Poirot.

Miss Lawson tossed her head angrily.

"I insist on making my protest! Disgraceful, that's what it is! Disgraceful!"

Poirot went on, unheeding.

"I was saying that if Miss Lawson staged that accident she did so for an entirely *different* reason—that is, she engineered it so that Miss Arundell *would naturally suspect her own family and become alienated from them*. That *was* a possibility! I searched to see if there were any confirmation or otherwise and I unearthed one very definite fact. If Miss Lawson wanted Miss Arundell

to suspect her own family, she would have stressed the fact of the dog, Bob, being *out* that night. But on the contrary Miss Lawson took the utmost pains to *prevent* Miss Arundell hearing of that. Therefore, I argued, Miss Lawson *must* be innocent."

Miss Lawson said sharply :

"I should hope so!"

"I next considered the problem of Miss Arundell's death. If one attempt to murder a person is made, a second attempt usually follows. It seemed to me significant that within a fortnight of the first attempt Miss Arundell should have died. I began to make inquiries.

"Dr. Grainger did not seem to think there was anything unusual about his patient's death. That was a little damping to my theory. But, inquiring into the happenings of the last evening before she was taken ill, I came across a rather significant fact. Miss Isabel Tripp mentioned a halo of light that had appeared round Miss Arundell's head. Her sister confirmed her statement. They might, of course, be inventing—in a romantic spirit—but I did not think that the incident was quite a likely one to occur to them unprompted. When questioning Miss Lawson she also gave me an interesting piece of information. She referred to a luminous ribbon issuing from Miss Arundell's mouth and forming a luminous haze round her head.

"Obviously, though described somewhat differently by two different observers, the actual *fact* was the same. What it amounted to, shorn of spiritualistic significance, was this : *On the night in question Miss Arundell's breath was phosphorescent!*"

Dr. Donaldson moved a little in his chair.

Poirot nodded to him.

"Yes, you begin to see. There are not very many phosphorescent substances. The first and most common one gave me exactly what I was looking for. I will read you a short extract from an article on phosphorus poisoning.

"*The person's breath may be phosphorescent before he*

feels in any way affected. That is what Miss Lawson and the Misses Tripp saw in the dark—Miss Arundell's phosphorescent breath—'a luminous haze.' And here I will read you again. *The jaundice having thoroughly pronounced itself, the system may be considered as not only under the influence of the toxic action of phosphorus, but as suffering in addition from all the accidents incidental to the retention of the biliary secretion in the blood, nor is there from this point any special difference between phosphorus poisoning and certain affections of the liver—such for example as yellow atrophy.*

"You see the cleverness of that? Miss Arundell has suffered for years from liver trouble. The symptoms of phosphorus poisoning would only look like *another attack of the same complaint.* There will be nothing new, nothing startling about it.

"Oh! it was well planned! Foreign matches—vermin paste? It is not difficult to get hold of phosphorus, and a very small dose will kill. The medicinal dose is from 1/100 to 1/30 grain.

"*Voilà.* How clear—how marvellously clear the whole business becomes! Naturally, the doctor is deceived—especially as I find his sense of smell is affected—the garlic odour of the breath is a distinct symptom of phosphorus poisoning. He had no suspicions—why should he have? There were no suspicious circumstances and the one thing that might have given him a hint was the one thing he would never hear—or if he did hear it he would only class it as spiritualistic nonsense.

"I was now sure (from the evidence of Miss Lawson and the Misses Tripp) that murder had been committed. The question still was by *whom?* I eliminated the servants—their mentality was obviously not adapted to such a crime. I eliminated Miss Lawson, since she would hardly have prattled on about luminous ectoplasm if she had been connected with the crime. I eliminated Charles Arundell, *since he knew, having seen the will, that he would gain nothing by his aunt's death.*

"There remained his sister Theresa, Dr. Tanios, Mrs. Tanios and Dr. Donaldson, whom I discovered to

have been dining in the house on the evening of the dog's ball incident.

"At this point I had very little to help me. I had to fall back upon the possibility of the crime and the personality of the murderer! Both crimes had roughly the same outline. They were both simple. They were cunning, and carried out with efficiency. They required a certain amount of knowledge but not a great deal. The facts about phosphorus poisoning are easily learned, and the stuff itself, as I say, is quite easily obtained, especially abroad.

"I considered first the two men. Both of them were doctors, and both were clever men. Either of them might have thought of phosphorus and its suitability in this particular case, but the incident of the dog's ball did not seem to fit a masculine mind. The incident of the ball seemed to me essentially a woman's idea.

"I considered first of all Theresa Arundell. She had certain potentialities. She was bold, ruthless, and not over-scrupulous. She had led a selfish and greedy life. She had always had everything she wanted and she had reached a point where she was desperate for money—both for herself and for the man she loved. Her manner, also, showed plainly that she knew her aunt had been murdered.

"There was an interesting little passage between her and her brother. I conceived the idea that *each suspected the other of the crime*. Charles endeavoured to make her say that *she knew of the existence of the new will*. Why? Clearly because if she knew of it she could not be suspected of the murder. She, on the other hand, clearly did not believe Charles's statement that Miss Arundell had shown it to him! She regarded it as a singularly clumsy attempt on his part to divert suspicion from himself.

"There was another significant point. Charles displayed a reluctance to use the word 'arsenic.' Later I found that he had questioned the old gardener at length upon the strength of some weed-killer. It was clear what had been in his mind."

Charles Arundell, of course, had been in the house on the evening of the dog's ball incident.

"I thought of it," he said. "But—well, I suppose I hadn't got the nerve."

Poirot nodded at him.

"Precisely, *it is not in your psychology*. Your crimes will always be the crimes of weakness. To steal, to forge—yes, it is the easiest way—but to kill—*no!* To kill one needs the type of mind that can be obsessed by an idea."

He resumed his lecturing manner.

"Theresa Arundell, I decided, had quite sufficient strength of mind to carry such a design through, but there were other facts to take into consideration. She had never been thwarted, she had lived fully and selfishly—but that type of person is *not the type that kills*—except perhaps in sudden anger. And yet—I felt sure—it was *Theresa Arundell who had taken the weed-killer from the tin*."

Theresa spoke suddenly :

"I'll tell you the truth. I thought of it. I actually took some weed-killer from a tin down at Littlegreen House. But I couldn't do it! I'm too fond of living—of being alive—I couldn't do that to any one—take life from them.... I may be bad and selfish but there are things I can't do! I couldn't kill a living, breathing, human creature!"

Poirot nodded. "No, that is true. And you are not as bad as you paint yourself, mademoiselle. You are only young—and reckless."

He went on :

"There remained Mrs. Tanios. As soon as I saw her I realized that she was afraid. She saw that I realized that and she very quickly made capital out of that momentary betrayal. She gave a very convincing portrait of a woman *who is afraid for her husband*. A little later she changed her tactics. It was very cleverly done—but the change did not deceive me. A woman can be afraid *for* her husband or she can be afraid *of* her husband—but she can hardly be *both*. Mrs. Tanios decided on the latter rôle—and she played her part cleverly—even to coming out after me into the hall of the hotel and pretend-

ing that there was something she wanted to tell me. When her husband followed her as she knew he would, she pretended that she could not speak before him.

"I realized at once, not that she feared her husband, but that she disliked him. And at once, summing the matter up, I felt convinced that here was the exact character I had been looking for. Here was—not a self-indulgent woman—but a thwarted one. A plain girl, leading a dull existence, unable to attract the men she would like to attract, finally accepting a man she did not care for rather than be left an old maid. I could trace her growing dissatisfaction with life, her life in Smyrna exiled from all she cared for in life. Then the birth of her children and her passionate attachment to them.

"Her husband was devoted to her, but she came secretly to dislike him more and more. He had speculated with her money and lost it—another grudge against him.

"There was only one thing that illumined her drab life, the expectation of her Aunt Emily's death. Then she would have money, independence, the means to educate her children as she wished—and remember education meant a lot to her—she was a professor's daughter!

"She may have already planned the crime, or had the idea of it in her mind, before she came to England. She had a certain knowledge of chemistry, having assisted her father in the laboratory. She knew the nature of Miss Arundell's complaint and she was well aware that phosphorus would be an ideal substance for her purpose.

"Then, when she came to Littlegreen House, a simpler method presented itself to her. The dog's ball—a thread or string across the top of the stairs. A simple, ingenious woman's idea.

"She made her attempt—and failed. I do not think that she had any idea that Miss Arundell was aware of the true facts of the matter. Miss Arundell's suspicions were directed entirely against Charles. I doubt if her manner to Bella showed any alteration. And so, quietly and determinedly, this self-contained, unhappy, ambitious woman put her original plan into execution. She found an excellent vehicle for the poison, some patent capsules

that Miss Arundell was in the habit of taking after meals. To open a capsule, place the phosphorus inside and close it again, was child's play. The capsule was replaced among the others. Sooner or later Miss Arundell would swallow it. Poison was not likely to be suspected. Even if by some unlikely chance it was, she herself would be nowhere near Market Basing at the time.

"Yet she took one precaution. She obtained a double supply of chloral hydrate at the chemist's, forging her husband's name to the prescription. I have no doubt of what that was for—to keep by her in case anything went wrong.

"As I say, I was convinced from the first moment I saw her that Mrs. Tanios was the person I was looking for, but I had absolutely no *proof* of the fact. I had to proceed carefully. If Mrs. Tanios had any idea I suspected her, I was afraid that she might proceed to a further crime. Furthermore, I believed that the idea of that crime had already occurred to her. Her one wish in life was to shake herself free of her husband.

"Her original murder had proved a bitter disappointment. The money, the wonderful all-intoxicating money, had all gone to Miss Lawson! It was a blow, but she set to work most intelligently. She began to work on Miss Lawson's conscience which, I suspect, was already not too comfortable."

There was a sudden outburst of sobs. Miss Lawson took out her handkerchief and cried into it.

"It's been dreadful," she sobbed. "I've been wicked! Very wicked. You see, I was very curious about the will—why Miss Arundell had made a new one, I mean. And one day, when Miss Arundell was resting, I managed to unlock the drawer in the desk. And then I found she'd left it all to *me*! Of course, I never dreamed it was so *much*. Just a few thousands—that's all I thought it was. And why not? After all, her own relations didn't really *care* for her! But then, when she was so ill, she asked for the will. I could see—I felt sure—she was going to destroy it.... And that's when I was so wicked. I told her she'd sent it back to Mr. Purvis. Poor dear

Miss Lawson told me that she had seen Theresa Arundell kneeling on the stairs on the night of Easter Monday. I soon discovered that Miss Lawson could not have seen Theresa at all clearly—not nearly clearly enough to recognize her *features*. Yet she was quite positive in her identification. On being pressed she mentioned a brooch with Theresa's initials—T.A.

"On my request Miss Theresa Arundell showed me the brooch in question. At the same time she absolutely denied having been on the stairs at the time stated. At first I fancied some one else had borrowed her brooch, but when I looked at the brooch in the glass the truth leaped at me. Miss Lawson, waking up, had seen a dim figure with the initials T.A. flashing in the light. She had leapt to the conclusion that it was Theresa.

"But if in the glass she had seen the initials T.A.—then the real initials must have been A.T., since the glass naturally reversed the order.

"Of course! Mrs. Tanios's mother was Arabella Arundell. Bella is only a contraction. A.T. stood for Arabella Tanios. There was nothing odd in Mrs. Tanios possessing a similar type of brooch. It had been exclusive last Christmas, but by the spring they were all the rage, and I had already observed that Mrs. Tanios copied her cousin Theresa's hats and clothes as far as she was able with her limited means.

"In my own mind, at any rate, my case was proved.

"Now—what was I to do? Obtain a Home Office order for the exhumation of the body? That could doubtless be managed. I *might* prove that Miss Arundell had been poisoned with phosphorus, though there was a little doubt about that. The body had been buried two months, and I understand that there have been cases of phosphorus poisoning where no lesions have been found and where the post-mortem appearances are very indecisive. Even then, could I connect Mrs. Tanios with the purchase or possession of phosphorus? Very doubtful, since she had probably obtained it abroad.

"At this juncture Mrs. Tanios took a decisive action. She left her husband, throwing herself on the pity of

Miss Lawson. She also definitely accused her husband of the murder.

"Unless I acted I felt convinced that he would be her next victim. I took steps to isolate them one from the other on the pretext that it was for her safety. She could not very well contradict that. Really, it was *his* safety I had in mind. And then—and then—"

He paused—a long pause. His face had gone rather white.

"But that was only a temporary measure. I had to make sure that the killer would kill no more. I had to assure the safety of the innocent.

"So I wrote out my construction of the case and gave it to Mrs. Tanios."

There was a long silence.

Dr. Tanios cried out :

"Oh, my God, so that's why she killed herself."

Poirot said gently :

"Was it not the best way? She thought so. There were, you see, the children to consider."

Dr. Tanios buried his face in his hands.

Poirot came forward and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"It had to be. Believe me it was necessary. There would have been more deaths. First yours—then possibly, under certain circumstances, Miss Lawson's. And so it goes on."

He paused.

In a broken voice Tanios said :

"She wanted me—to take a sleeping-draught one night... There was something in her face—I threw it away. That was when I began to believe her mind was going...."

"Think of it that way. It is indeed partly true. But not in the legal meaning of the term. She knew the meaning of her action...."

Dr. Tanios said wistfully :

"She was much too good for me—always."

A strange epitaph on a self-confessed murderess!

'No, I live here, but I couldn't go home looking like this. My family - they won't even allow me to smoke. All right, Eddie.'

'Looks better on you than it does on me,' said Norma.

'I wouldn't say that,' said Eddie.

'I wouldn't either,' said Gloria, 'but Eddie never says anything to make me get conceited. We've known each other such a long time.'

'Eddie, I thought you went on the wagon after Friday,' said Norma.

'I did.'

'Oh, that. That's mine,' said Gloria. 'I bought it for Eddie because I wanted to get in his good graces. You see I thought I was going to have to spend the day here and I was going to bribe Eddie to go uptown to one of the Broadway shops, I think there are some open on Sunday night, they always seem to be open. But then he suggested you, and I think you're perfectly darling to do this. I'll hang this up in one of your closets, Eddie, and call for it tomorrow. I've been intending to put it in storage but I keep putting it off and putting it off -'

'I know,' said Miss Day.

'- and then last night I was glad I hadn't, because a cousin of mine that goes to Yale, he and a friend arrived in an open car and it was cold. No top. They were frozen, but they insisted on driving out to a house party near Princeton.'

'Oh. Weren't your family worried? You didn't go home then?'

'The car broke down on the way back at some ungodly hour this morning. Bob, my cousin's friend, took us to a party when we got back to town and that's where I got in the crap game.'

'But what about your cousin? I should think -'

'Passed out cold, and he's not much help anyway. Not that he'd let them make me give up my dress, but he can't drink. None of our family can. I had two drinks of that Scotch and I'm reeling. I suppose you noticed it.'

'Oh, no. But I can never tell with other people till they start doing perfectly terrible things,' said Miss Day.

'Well, I feel grand. I feel like giving a party. By the way, before I forget it, if you give me your address I'll have these things cleaned and send them to you.'

'All right,' said Miss Day, and gave her address.

'Let's go to the Brevoort, but my treat.'

'I thought you lost all your money,' said Miss Day.

'I did, but I cashed a cheque on the way downtown. A man that works for my uncle cashed it for me. Shall we go?'

*

The nose of the Packard convertible went now up, now down. The car behaved like an army tank on a road that ordinarily was used only by trucks. Paul Farley, driving, was chewing on his lower lip, and the man beside him, looking quite pleased with himself and the world at large, was holding his chin up and dropping the ashes of his cigar on the floor of Farley's car.

'Let's stop,' said the man. 'Just take one more look. See how it looks from here.'

Farley stopped, none too pleased, and looked around. It did please him to look at the nearly finished house; it was his work. 'Looks pretty swell to me,' he said.

'I think so,' said Percy Kahan. He was just learning to say things like 'I think so' when he meant 'You're damn right'. People like Farley, you never knew when they were going to say something simple, like 'You're damn right', or something sophisticated, restrained, like 'I think so'. But it was better to err on the side of the restrained than the enthusiastic. Besides, he was the buyer; Farley was still working for him as architect, and it didn't do to let Farley think he was doing too well.

'A swell job. I know when I've done a swell job, and I've done one for you, Mr Kahan. About the game room, my original estimate won't cover that now. I could have done it earlier in the game, but I don't suppose you're going to quibble over at the most twelve hundred dollars now. You understand what I meant about the game room itself. That could be done for a great deal less, and still can, but if you want it to be in keeping with the rest of the house my best advice is, don't try to save on the little things. I was one of the first architects to go in for game rooms, that is to recognize them as an important feature of the modern home. Up to that time a game room - well, I suppose you've seen enough of them to know what most of them were like. Extra space in the cellar, so they put in a portable bar, ping-pong table, a few posters from the French Line -'

'Oh, I want those. Can you get them?'

'I think so. I never like to ask them for anything, because I have my private opinion of the whole French Line crowd, but that's a mere detail. Anyway, what I want to point out is that I was one of the first to see what an important adjunct to the home a game room can be. I'd like to show you some things I've done out in the Manhasset section. The Whitney neighbourhood, you know.'

'Oh, did you do the Jock Whitney estate too?'

'No, I didn't do that, but in that section I've - two years ago I had eleven thousand dollars to spend on one game room out that way.'

'But that was two years ago,' said Mr Kahan. 'Whose house was that?'

'Well-hell, I, uh, it isn't exactly ethical to give names and figures, Mr Kahan. You understand that. Anyway, you see my point about not trying to chisel a few dollars in such an important feature of the home. For instance, you'll want a large open fireplace, you said. Well, that's going to cost you money now. You see, not to be too technical about it, we've gone ahead without making any provision for fireplaces on that side of the house, the side where it would have to be if you wanted it in the game room. And, you have the right idea about it. There *should be* an open fireplace there.'

'You see, Mr Kahan, I want this house to be right. I'll be frank with you. A lot of us architects just can't take it, and a lot of fellows I know are pretty darn pessimistic about the future. Naturally we've been hit pretty hard, some of us, but I personally can't complain. So far this year I've done well over a half a million dollars' worth of business -'

'Net?'

'Oh, no. Not net. I'm a residence architect, Mr Kahan. But that stacks up pretty well beside what I've been doing the last three years. I had my best year oddly enough last year, Mr Kahan.'

'No kidding.'

'Oh, yes. I had a lot of work in Palm Beach. And so far this year I've had a very good, a very satisfactory year. But next year, I'm a little afraid of next year. Not because people haven't got the money, but because they're afraid to spend it. There's an awful lot of hoarding going on. I know a man who is turning everything he

n into gold. Gold notes when he can't get the actual bullion. Well, that isn't so good. The general spirit of alarm and unrest, and next year being a Presidential year, but I've got my overhead, I've got my expenses, Presidential year or no Presidential year. So far haven't had to lay off a single draughtsman and I don't want to have to do it, but great heavens, if people are going to take their money out of industry and let it lie gathering dust in safe deposit vaults, or in secret vaults in their own homes, the general effect is going to be pretty bad.

'Now with a house like this, people will see this house and they can't help being enchanted with it, and it's been my experience that a house like yours, Mr Kahan, with a page or two of photographs in *Town and Country* and *Country Life* and *Spur*, people who might be tempted to hoard their money -'

'You mean pictures of this house in *Town and Country*?'

'Naturally,' said Farley. 'You don't suppose I'd let this house go without - unless you'd rather not. Of course if you'd -'

'Oh, no. Not me. I'm in favour of that. Don't tell Mrs Kahan, though. It'd make a nice surprise for her.'

'Certainly. Women like that. And women are mighty important in these things. As I was saying, I'm counting on people seeing this house, and your friends and neighbours coming in - that's one reason why I'd like to see you have a good game room, when you entertain informally, people will see what a really fine house you have, and they'll want to know who did the house. It's good business for me to do a good job for you any time, Mr Kahan, but especially now.'

'*Town and Country*, eh? Do I send in the pictures or do you?'

'Oh, they'll send for them. They call up and find out my plans in advance, you know, and I tell them what houses I'm doing, or at least my secretary does - it's all routine. I suppose I've had more houses chosen for photographing in those magazines than any architect within ten years of my age. Shall we go back to the club? I imagine the ladies are wondering what's happened.'

'Okay, but now listen, Mr Farley, I don't want you paying for dinner again. Remember last time we were out ~~here~~ I said next

big dinner, and I might as well warn you in advance, Mrs Farley knows wines. I don't know a damn thing about them, but she does.'

They drove to the club, where the ladies were waiting; Mrs Farley fingering her wedding ring and engagement ring and guard in a way she had when she was nervous, Mrs Kahan painlessly pinching the lobe of her left ear, a thing she did when she was nervous.

'Well,' said the four, in unison.

Farley asked the others if they would like cocktails, and they all said they would, and he took Kahan to the locker-room to wash his hands and to supervise the mixing of the drinks. As they were coming in the locker-room a man was on his way out, in such a hurry that he bumped Kahan. 'Oh, I beg your pardon, sir,' said the man.

'Oh, that's all right, Mr Liggett,' said Kahan.

'Oh - oh, how are you,' said Liggett. 'Glad to see you.'

'You don't know who I am,' said Kahan, 'but we were classmates at New Haven.'

'Oh, of course.'

'Kahan is my name.'

'Yes, I remember. Hello, Farley.'

'Hello, Liggett, you join us in a cocktail?'

'No, thanks. I've got a whole family waiting in the car. Well, nice to have seen you, Kann. 'Bye, Farley.' He shook hands and hurried away.

'He didn't know me, but I knew him right away.'

'I didn't know you went to Yale,' said Farley.

'I know. I never talk about it,' said Kahan. 'Then once in a while I see somebody like Liggett, one of the big Skull and Bones fellows he was, and one day I met old Doctor Hadley on the street and I introduced myself to him. I can't help it. I think what a waste of time, four years at that place, me a little Heeb from Hartford, but last November I had to be in Hollywood when the Yale-Harvard game was played, and God damn it if I don't have a special wire with the play by play. The radio wasn't good enough for me. I had to have the play by play. Yes, I'm a Yale man.'

Chapter 3

'WELL, I can see why you didn't want me to see the ending first. I never would have stayed in the theatre if I'd seen that ending. And you wanted to see that again? God, I hope if you ever write anything it won't be like that.'

'I hope if I ever write anything it affects somebody the way this affected you,' said Jimmy.

'I suppose you think that's good. I mean good writing,' said Isabel. 'Where shall we go?'

'Are you hungry?'

'No, but I'd like a drink. One cocktail. Is that understood?'

'Always. Always one cocktail. That's always understood. I know a place I'd like to take you to, but I'm a little afraid to.'

'Why, is it tough?'

'It isn't really tough. I mean it doesn't look tough, and the people - well, you don't think you're in the Racquet Club, but unless you know where you are, I mean unless you're tipped off about what the place has, what its distinction is, it's just another speakeasy, and right now if I told you what its distinguishing characteristic is, you wouldn't want to go there.'

'Well, then let's not go there,' she said. 'What is peculiar about the place?'

'It's where the Chicago mob hangs out in New York.'

'Oh, well, then by all means let's go there. That is, if it's safe.'

'Of course it's safe. Either it's safe or it isn't. They tell me the local boys approve of this place, that is, they sanction it, allow it to exist and do business, because they figure there has to be one place as a sort of hangout for members of the Chicago mobs. There's only one real danger.'

'What's that?'

'Well, if the Chicago mob starts shooting among themselves. So far that hasn't happened, and I don't imagine it will. You'll see why.'

They walked down Broadway a few blocks and then turned and walked east. When they came to a highly polished brass sign which advertised a wigmaker, Jimmy steered Isabel into the narrow doorway, back a few steps, and rang for the elevator. It grinded its way

down, and a sick-eyed little Negro with a uniform cap opened the door. They got in and Jimmy said: 'Sixth Avenue Club.'

'Yessa,' said the Negro. The elevator rose two stories and stopped. They got out and were standing then right in front of a steel door, painted red, and with a tiny door cut out in the middle. Jimmy rang the bell and a face appeared in the tiny door.

'Yes, sir,' said the face. 'What was the name again?'

'You're new or you'd know me,' said Jimmy.

'Yes, sir, and what was the name again?'

'Malloy, for Christ's sake.'

'And what was the address, Mr Malloy?'

'Oh, nuts. Tell Luke Mr Malloy is here.'

There was a sound of chains and locks and the door was opened. The waiter stood behind the door. 'Have to be careful who we let in, sir. You know how it is.'

It was a room with a high ceiling, a fairly long bar on one side, and in the corner on the other side was a food bar, filled with really good free lunch and with obviously expensive kitchen equipment behind the bar. Jimmy steered Isabel to the bar.

'Hello, Luke,' he said.

'Howdy do, sir,' said Luke, a huge man with a misleading pleasant face, not unlike Babe Ruth's.

'Have a whiskey sour, darling. Luke mixes the best whiskey sours you've ever had.'

'I think I want a Planter's punch - all right, a whiskey sour.'

'Yours, sir?'

'Scotch and soda, please.'

Isabel looked around. The usual old rascal looking into a schooner of beer and the usual phony club licence hung above the bar mirror. Many bottles, including a bottle of Rock and Rye, another speciality of Luke's, stood on the back bar. Except for the number and variety of the bottles, and the cleanliness of the bar, it was just like any number (up to 20,000) of speakeasies near to and far from Times Square. Then Isabel saw one little article that disturbed her: an 'illuminated' calendar, with a pocket for letters or bills or something, with a picture of a voluptuous dame with nothing on above the waist. The calendar still had not only all the months intact, but also a top sheet with '1931' on it. And across the front of the pocket was the invitation 'When in Chicago Visit

not two kinds of Irishmen. There's only one kind. I've studied enough pictures and known enough Irishmen personally to find that out.'

'What do you mean, studied enough pictures?'

'I mean this, I've looked at dozens of pictures of the best Irish families at the Dublin Horse Show and places like that, and I've put my finger over their clothes and pretended I was looking at a Knights of Columbus picnic - and by God you can't tell the difference.'

'Well, why should you? They're all Irish.'

'Ah, that's exactly my point. Or at least we're getting to it. So, a while ago you say I look like James Cagney -'

'Not look like him. Remind me of him.'

'Well, there's a faint resemblance, I happen to know, because I have a brother who looks enough like Cagney to be his brother. Well, Cagney is a Mick, without any pretence of being anything else, and he is America's ideal gangster. America, being a non-Irish, anti-Catholic country, has its own idea of what a real gangster looks like, and along comes a young Mick who looks like my brother, and he fills the bill. He is the typical gangster.'

'Well, I don't see what you prove by that. I think -'

'I didn't prove anything yet. Here's the big point. You know about the Society of the Cincinnati? You've heard about them?'

'Certainly.'

'Well, if I'm not mistaken I could be a member of that Society. Anyway I could be a Son of the Revolution. Which is nice to know sometimes, but for the present purpose I only mention it to show that I'm pretty God-damn American, and therefore my brothers and sisters are, and yet we're not American. We're Micks, we're non-assimilable, we Micks. We've been here, at least some of my family, since before the Revolution - and we produce the perfect gangster type! At least it's you American Americans' idea of a perfect gangster type, and I suppose you're right. Yes, I guess you are. The first real gangsters in this country were Irish. The Mollic Maguires. Anyway, do you see what I mean by all this non-assimilable stuff?'

'Yes, I suppose I do.'

'All right. Let me go on just a few sticks more. I show a logical fact, I prove a sociological fact in one respect at

suppose I could walk through Grand Central at the same time President Hoover was arriving on a train, and the Secret Service boys wouldn't collar me on sight as a public enemy. That's because I dress the way I do, and I dress the way I do because I happen to prefer these clothes to Broadway clothes or Babbitt clothes. Also, I have nice manners because my mother was a lady and manners were important to her, also to my father in a curious way, but when I was learning manners I was at an age when my mother had greater influence on me than my father, so she gets whatever credit is due me for my manners. Sober.

'Well, I am often taken for a Yale man, by Yale men. That pleases me a little, because I like Yale best of all the colleges. There's another explanation for it, unfortunately. There was a football player at Yale in 1922 and around that time who looks like me and has a name something like mine. That's not important.'

'No, except that it takes away from your point about producing public enemies, your family. You can't look like a gangster *and* a typical Yale man.'

'That's true. I have an answer for that. Let me see. Oh, yes. The people who think I am a Yale man aren't very observing about people. I'm not making that up as a smart answer. It's true. In fact, I just thought of something funny.'

'What?'

'Most men who think I'm a Yale man went to Princeton themselves.'

'Oh, come on,' she said. 'You just said -'

'All right. I know. Well, that's not important and I'm only confusing the issue. What I want to say, what I started out to explain was why I said "you people, you members of the upper crust", and so on, implying that I am not a member of it. Well, I'm *not* a member of it, and now I never will be. If there was any chance of it it disappeared - let me see - two years ago.'

'Why two years ago? You can't say that. What happened?'

'I starved. Two years ago I went for two days one time without a thing to eat or drink except water, and part of the time without a cigarette. I was living within two blocks of this place, and I didn't have a job, didn't have any prospect of one, I couldn't write to my family, because I'd written a bad cheque a while before that and

I was in very bad at home. I couldn't borrow from anybody, because I owed everybody money. I'd borrowed from practically everybody I knew even slightly. A dollar here, ten dollars there. I stayed in for two days because I couldn't face the people on the street. Then the nigger woman that cleaned up and made the beds in this place where I lived, she knew what was happening, and the third morning she came to work she brought me a chicken sandwich. I'll never forget it. It was on rye bread, and home-cooked chicken, not flat and white, but chunky and more tan than white. It was wrapped in newspaper. She came in and said, "Good morning, Mr Malloy. I brought you a chicken sandwich if you like it." That's all. She didn't say why she brought it, and then she went out and bought me a container of coffee and pinched a couple of cigarettes - Camels, and I smoke Luckies - from one of the other rooms. She was swell. She knew.'

'I should think she was swell enough for you to call her a coloured woman instead of a nigger.'

'Oh, balls!'

'I'm leaving.'

'Go ahead.'

'Just a Mick.'

'See? The first thing you can think of to insult me with. Go on, beat it. Waiter, will you open the door for this lady, please?'

'Aren't you coming with me?'

'Oh, I guess so. How much, Luke?'

'That'll be one-twenty,' said Luke, showing, by showing nothing on his face, that he strongly disapproved the whole thing.

Exits like the one Isabel wanted to make are somewhat less difficult to make since the repeal of Prohibition. In those days you had to wait for the waiter to peer through the small door, see that everything was all right, open at least two locks, and hold the door open for you. The most successful flouncing out in indignation is done through swinging doors.

He had to ring for the elevator and wait for it in silence, they had to ride down together in silence, and find a taxi with a driver in it. There were plenty of taxis, but the hackmen were having their usual argument among themselves over the Tacna-Arica award and a fare was apparently the last thing in the world that

interested them. However, a cruising taxi appeared and Isabel and Jimmy got in.

'Home?' said Jimmy.

'Yes, please,' said Isabel.

Jimmy began to sing: '... How's your uncle? I haven't any uncle. I hope he's fine and dandy too.'

Silence.

'Four years ago this time do you know what was going on?'

'No.'

'The Snyder-Gray trial.'

Silence.

'Remember it?'

'Certainly.'

'What was Mr Snyder's first name?'

'Whose?'

'Mister *Sny*-der's.'

'It wasn't Mister Snyder. It was Ruth Snyder. Ruth Snyder, and Judd Gray.'

'There was a Mr Snyder, though. Ah, yes, there was a Mr Snyder. It was he, dear Isabel, it was he who was assassinated. What was his first name?'

'Oh, how should I know? What do I care what his first name was?'

'Why are you sore at me?'

'Because you humiliated me in public, calling the waiter and asking him to take me to the door, barking at me and saying perfectly vile, vile things.'

'Humiliated you in public,' he said. 'Humiliated you in public. And you don't remember Mr Snyder's first name.'

'If you're going to talk, talk sense. Not that I care whether you talk or not.'

'I'm talking a lot of sense. You're sore at me because I humiliated you in public. What the hell does that amount to? Humiliated in public. What about the man that Ruth Snyder and Judd Gray knocked off? I'd say he was humiliated in public, plenty. Every newspaper in the country carried his name for days, column after column of humiliation, all kinds of humiliation. And yet you don't even remember his name. Humiliation my eye.'

'It isn't the same thing.'

used by someone else - that was a gift from the gods to Liggett. He would apply for his tickets, sign the pledge that went with the tickets - and then when some properly placed Tanimany man came to him for a pair for the Harvard game, Liggett would explain about the pledge but he would turn over the tickets. Liggett did not think it entirely necessary to justify this violation of his word of honour, but he had two justifications ready: the first was that he did not approve of the pledge; the second, that he had got boils on his arse year after year for Yale, four years of rowing without missing a race, and he felt that made him a better judge of what to do with one of the few benefits he derived from being an old 'Y' man than some clerk in the Athletic Association office. On at least one occasion those tickets made the difference between getting an equipment contract and not getting it. And so, looking at it one way, he was a valuable man to the firm. The plant no longer belonged to the Liggett family, but he was a director, as a teaser for any lingering good will that his father and grandfather might have left. He voted his own and his sister's stock, but he voted the way he was told by the attorney for his father's estate, who was also a director.

It took the whole year 1930 to teach him that he just did not know his way around that stock market. Business was a simple thing, he told himself: it was buying and selling, supply and demand. His grandfather had come over here, a little English mechanic from Birmingham, and supplied a demand. His father had continued the supply and demand part, but had also gone in more extensively for the buying and selling. In 1930 Liggett reasoned with himself: the buying and selling is not up to me the way it was up to my father, and neither is the supplying of the demand up to me the way it was up to Grandfather. I am in the position of participating in the activities of both my grandfather and my father, and yet since I am not right there at the plant, I have something they didn't have. I have a detached point of view. Liggett & Company are supplying - and selling. Now wherever I go I see buildings going up, I see excavations being made. A few common stocks - all right, *all* common stocks - have taken a thumping, but that's because some of them were undoubtedly priced at more than they were worth. All right. Something happens and the whole market goes smacko. Why? Well, who can

explain a thing like that; why. But it happened and in the long run it's going to be a good thing, because when those stocks go up there again, this time they're going to be worth it.

On that basis he brought his income down from the \$75,000 he earned in 1929 to about \$27,000 for 1930. His salary was \$25,000 and this was not cut, for his Tammany connexions were as good in 1930 as they were in 1929, and he sold. In 1929 his income from Liggett & Company, aside from salary, was \$40,000 including commissions. In addition he had an income of about \$10,000 from his mother's estate, which was tied up in non-Liggett investments in Pittsburgh. In 1930 his profits from Liggett & Company amounted to \$15,000 which went to his brokers, as did the \$5,000 he got from his mother's estate. But he and another man did make \$2,000 apiece from an unexpected source, and they thought seriously of doing it every year.

Liggett convinced himself he had to go abroad in the Spring of 1930, and a man he had known in College but less well in the after years, came to him with a scheme which took Liggett's breath away. They talked it over in the smoke room, and as part of the scheme they bought out the low field in the ship's pool. The next day shortly after high noon the ship stopped, and was stopped for a good hour. As a result of the delay Liggett and his friend, holding the low field, won the biggest pool of the voyage, and Liggett's end was around \$2,000. It was not clear profit, however; \$500 of it went to the steward whom they had bribed to fall overboard at noon that day. In Liggett's favour it must be said that he refused at first to go into the scheme, and would not have done so had he not been assured that a financier whom he always had looked up to as a model of righteousness and decorum had once given the bridge an out-and-out-bribe, with subtle threats to back it up, to win a pool that didn't even pay his passage. Also, Liggett had to be assured that his fellow-conspirator would choose a steward who could swim. . . .

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could look at the horrible people and that took your mind off the air) and rode the rest of the way home in a taxi.

He looked for signs of something in the face of the elevator operator, but nothing there, only that six-months-from-Christmas 'Good afternoon, sir'. He hurriedly inspected the apartment, even opening the kitchen door that opened upon the service hall.

'Well, she's not here,' he said aloud, and went back to take a better look at the bathroom. She certainly had made a nice little mess of that. Then he noticed that his toothbrush, which always, always stood in a tumbler, was lying on the lavatory. A tube of toothpaste had been squeezed in the middle and the cap had not been replaced. He held the toothbrush to his nose. Yes, by God, the bitch had brushed her teeth with his brush. He broke it in half and threw it in a trash basket.

In the bedroom he saw her evening gown and evening coat. He picked up the gown and looked at it. He turned it inside out and looked at it at approximately the point where her legs would begin on her body, expecting to find he knew not what, and finding nothing. It was a good job of tearing he had done and he was embarrassed about that. From the way she had behaved when once he got her into bed there was no reason to suspect her of being a teaser, but why had she been so teaser-like when he brought her home? They were both drunk, and he had to admit that she was a little less drunk than he, could drink more was what he was trying not to admit. She had come home with a man she had met only that night, come to his apartment after necking with him in a taxi and allowing him to feel her breasts. She had gone to his bathroom and when she came out and saw him standing there waiting for her with a drink in his hand she accepted the drink but was all for going back to the living-room. 'No, it's much more comfortable here,' he remembered saying, and remembered thinking that if he hadn't said anything it would have been better, for as soon as he spoke she said she thought it was more comfortable in the living-room, and he said all right, it was more comfortable in the living-room but that they were going to stay here. 'Oh, but you're wrong,' she said, and looked at him in the face and then slowly down his body, the frankest look anyone ever had given him, the only time he ever was completely sure that he was looking at someone's thoughts. He got up and put his drink on a table and

took her in his arms as roughly as possible. He squeezed her body against his until she felt really small to him. She kept her drink in her hand and held it high while she leaned her head back as far as she could, her face away from his face. She stopped speaking, but she did not look angry. Tolerant. She looked tolerant, as though she were dealing with a prep school kid, as though she were suffering but knew this would be over in a little while and she would be there, with her drink in her hand and her dignity unaffected. That finally was what made him release her, but not for the reason she supposed. She thought he was going to give up, but that dignity was too much for him. He had to break that some way, so he let her go, took his arms from around her, and then snatched the top of the front of her dress and ripped it right down the front. It tore right down the middle.

Instantly there were changes. He had frightened her and she was pitiful and sweet. He didn't even notice that her dignity was at least genuine enough to cause her to hold on to the drink and walk two steps with it to a table. For a minute, two minutes, he was ready to love her with all the tenderness and kindness that seemed to be all of a sudden at his command, somewhere inside him. He followed her to the table and waited for her to put down the drink. He was aware now, the day after, but hadn't been last night, that she looked a little posed, in a trite pose, with her chin almost on her shoulder, her eyes looking away from him, her right arm making a protective V over her chest, her left hand cupped under her right elbow. He put his hands on her biceps and pressed a little. 'Kiss me,' he said.

'As a reward,' she said.

She turned her face toward him, sufficient indication that she would kiss him. He put his hands in back of her again and kissed her tenderly on the mouth, and then she slowly lowered her arms from in front of her and put them around him, and she walked up to him without moving her feet.

Thinking of it now he knew that it went beyond love. It was so completely what it was, so new in its thoroughness and proficiency that for the first time in his life he understood how these guys, these bright young subalterns, betray King and Country for a woman. He even understood how they could do it while knowing that the woman was a spy, that she was not faithful to them; for he did not

care how many men Gloria had stayed with since she left this apartment; he wanted her now. He hadn't remembered this all afternoon, so long as he was with Emily and the girls, but right now if he could have Gloria here he would not care if Emily and the kids came in and watched. 'God damn it!' he shouted. She couldn't possibly know the things he knew. He was forty-two, and she wasn't less than twenty years younger than he, and - aah, what difference did it make. Wherever she was he'd find her, and he would get her an apartment tonight. This, then, was what happened to men that made people speak of the dangerous age and all that. Well, dangerous age, make a fool of yourself, whatever else was coming to him he would take if he could have that girl. But he would have to have her over and over again, a year of having her. And to make sure of that he would get her an apartment. Tonight. Tomorrow she could have the charge accounts.

He telephoned her at home, not expecting to find her there, but there was always the chance. A timid male voice answered; probably her father, Liggett thought. She was not home and was not expected back till later this evening. That did not discourage Liggett. He thought he knew enough about her to know where to find her. He made a bundle of her evening clothes and took it with him and went downstairs and took a taxi to the Grand Central. He checked the bundle there and was going to throw away the check, but thought she might like to have the dress for some reason, maybe sentimental, maybe to patch something. Women often saved old dresses for reasons like that, and he had no right to throw away the check. Besides, the coat was all right. He hadn't thought of that at first, because all he thought of was the torn dress. It was annoying the way he kept thinking of that. He liked to think of tearing the dress and stripping her, all in one thought, with the memory of how she had looked at just that moment, her body and her terror. But the fact of tearing a girl's dress was embarrassing and he did not like to be left alone with that thought. He went to a speakeasy in East Fifty-third Street, the one in which two men inside of two years shot themselves in the men's toilet. They were taking the last few chairs off the tables, getting ready to open up, but the bar was open and a man in a cutaway and a woman friend were having drinks. The man was a gentleman, in his late forties. The woman was in her early thirties, tall and voluptuous. They

were a little drunk and having an argument when Liggett entered the bar, and the man took the woman's arm and steered her away from the bar to a table in the same room but away from Liggett. Obviously the woman was the man's mistress and he was helplessly in love with her.

'Ever since I've known you,' she said, very loud, 'you've asked me nothing but questions.'

Liggett got some nickels and went to the phone booth to call an engineer friend. The engineer did not answer. He tried two other engineer friends because he wanted to go on a tour of the speak-easies where he would be likely to find Gloria, and he wanted to be with a man but not one of his real friends. They would be at home with their wives or out to parties with their wives, and he wanted to go out with a man whose wife did not know Emily. He tried these engineers, but no soap. No answer. He tried a third, a man he did not specially like, and the man was very cordial and tried to insist on Liggett's coming right up and joining a cocktail party where there was a swell bunch. Liggett got out of that. In another minute he was sure he could have had the company of the man in the cutaway, judging by the conversation between the man and his woman. The conversation had taken a renunciatory turn and the woman was any minute now going home and sending back everything he had ever given her, and he knew what he could do with it. Not wishing to be left alone with the man, Liggett drank the rest of his highball, paid his bill, and went to another speakeasy, next door.

The first person he saw was Gloria, all dressed up in a very smart little suit. She gave him a blank look. She was with a young man and a pretty young girl. He went over and shook hands and Gloria introduced him to the other people and finally asked him to sit down for a second, that they were just leaving.

'Oh, I thought we were going to have dinner here,' said Miss Day. 'I'm really getting hungry.'

There was a silence for the benefit of Miss Day, who was being tacitly informed by everyone at the table that she should have known better than to say that. 'Are you waiting for someone?' said Liggett.

'Not exactly,' said Gloria.

'I really feel like an awful stupid and rude and all when you were

so kind to invite us for dinner,' said Miss Day, 'but really, Miss Wandrous, I'd of rather stayed at the Brevoort and ate there because I was hungry then. I - ' Then she shut up.

'I think we ought to go,' said Mr Brunner. 'Gloria, we'll take a rain check on that dinner.' He had not been drinking, and he had a kind of surly-sober manner that men sometimes get who are temporarily on the wagon but usually good drinkers. Liggett quickly stood up before they changed their minds. Miss Day apparently had postponed her appetite because she got up too.

When they had gone Liggett said: 'I've been trying to get you. I phoned all over and I was going to look everywhere in New York till I did find you. What are you drinking?'

'Rye and plain water.'

'Rye and plain water, and Scotch and soda for me. Do you want to eat here?'

'Am I having dinner with you?'

'Well, aren't you?'

'I don't know. What do you want that you've been calling me all over, as you put it, although I don't know where you'd be apt to call me except home.'

'And the Manger.'

'That's not funny. I was drunk last night. That won't happen again.'

'Yes. It *must* happen again. It's got to. Listen, I don't know how to begin.'

'Then don't, if it's a proposition. Because if it's a proposition I'm not interested.' She knew she was lying, for she was interested in almost any proposition; interested in hearing it, at least. But so far she could not tell which way he was headed. He had said nothing to indicate that he had discovered her theft of the coat, but his avoiding that topic might be tactical and only that. She resolved not to say anything about it until he did, but to wait for the first crack that would indicate that he wanted the coat back. She was not at this point prepared to take a stand about the coat, Later, maybe, but not now.

He looked down at his hands, which were making 'Here's the church, here's the steeple, open the door, and there's all the people.'

'Do you know what I want?' he said.

It was the tip of her tongue to say yes, the pink coat. She said, 'Why, I haven't the faintest idea.'

He reached in his pocket and brought out the check for the bundle he had left at Grand Central. 'You,' he said.

'What's this?' she said, taking the check.

'The rye is for Miss Wandrous. Scotch for me,' said Liggett to the waiter who had sneaked up with the drinks. When he went away Liggett went on: 'That's for your dress and coat. You got the money I left. Was it enough?'

'Yes. What do you mean you want me?'

'Well, I should think that would be plain enough. I want you. I want to - if I get you an apartment will you live in it?'

'Oh,' she said. 'Well, I live at home with my family.'

'You can tell them you have a job and you want to be uptown.'

'But I didn't say I wanted to live uptown. What makes you want me for your mistress? I didn't know you had a mistress, I know that gag, so don't you say it.'

'I wasn't going to. I want you, that's why.'

'Do you want me to tell you?'

'Well -'

'First you want me because I'm good in bed and your wife isn't. Or if she is - don't bridle. I guess she is, judging by the way you took that. But you're tired of her and you want me because I'm young enough to be your daughter.'

'Just about,' he said. 'I'd have had to have you when I was very young.'

'Not so very. I saw pictures of your daughters in your living room, and they're not much younger than I am. But I don't want you to feel too old so we'll pass over that. You want me, and you think because you paid the rent for an apartment that I'd be yours and no one else's. Isn't that true?'

'No. As a matter of fact it isn't. I was thinking not an hour ago, before I knew where you were, Gloria, I discovered something and that is, I didn't care who you were with or in what bed, I still wanted you.'

'Oh. Desperate. You *are* getting a little, uh, you're getting worried about how near fifty is, aren't you?'

'Maybe. I don't think so. Men don't get menopause. I may have as many years left as you. I've taken good care of myself.'

'I hope.'

'I hope you have, too.'

'Don't you worry about me. The first thing I do tomorrow is go to my friend on Park Avenue.'

'Who's your friend on Park Avenue?'

'My friend on Park Avenue? That's my doctor. I'll be able to tell you this week whether there's anything the matter with you, and me.'

'Do you always go to him?'

'Always, without fail. Listen, you, I don't want to sit here and talk about venereal disease. You didn't let me finish what I was saying. You think I'd be faithful to you because you gave me an apartment. My handsome friend, I would be faithful to you only as long as I wanted to be, which might be a year or might be till tomorrow afternoon. No. No apartment for me. If you want to take an apartment where we can go when I want to go with you, or where you can take anyone you please, that's entirely up to you. But after looking around at your apartment and making a guess as to how you live? Not interested. You haven't enough money to own me. Last year, last fall, that is, I got a pretty good idea how much I was worth. Could you pay the upkeep on a hundred and eighty-foot yacht? Diesel yacht?'

'No, frankly.'

'Well, this man could and does, and I'll bet he doesn't use it half a dozen times a year. He goes to the boat races in it and takes a big party of young people, and has it down in Florida with him when he goes, and before it was his I saw it at Monte Carlo.'

'I guess I know who that is.'

'Yes, I guess you do. Well, he wanted me, too.'

'Why didn't you take him up if you want money?'

'Do you know why? Because do you know those pictures of pygmies in the Sunday papers? Little men with legs like match sticks and fat bellies with big umbilicals and wrinkled skin? That's what he looks like. Also I can't say I enjoy his idea of fun. Ugh.'

'What?'

'I honestly wouldn't know how to tell you. I'd be embarrassed. Maybe you've heard, if you know who it is.'

'You mean he's peculiar?'

'Huh. Peculiar. Listen, darling, do you know why I like you?'

I do like you. Do you know why? You're just a plain ordinary everyday man. You think you're something pretty hot and sophisticated because you're unfaithful to your wife. Well, I could tell you things about this rotten God damn dirty town that - ugh. I know a man that was almost elected - Well, I guess I better shut up. I know much too much for my age. But I like you, Liggett, because you want me the way I want to be wanted, and not with fancy variations. Let's get out of here, it's too damn effete.'

'Where do you want to go?' Liggett said.

'Down to Fortieth Street to my practically favourite place.'

They went to the place in Fortieth Street, up a winding staircase. They were admitted after being peered at, it turned out, by a man with a superb case of acne rosacea. 'I was afraid you wouldn't remember me,' said Gloria.

'What? Fancy me not remembering you, Miss?' said the man, who was the bartender.

'And what will be your pleasure to partake of this Lord's Day?' said the bartender. 'Little Irish, perhaps?'

'Yes, fine.'

'And you, sir?'

'Scotch and soda.'

'Fine. Fine,' said the bartender.

It was the longest bar in New York in those days, and the room was bare except for the absolute essentials. One half of it held tables and chairs and a mechanical piano, but there was one half in front of the bar which was bare concrete floor. Liggett and Gloria were getting used to themselves and smiling at each other in the mirror when a voice rose.

'Laddy doo, Laddy doo, Lie die dec. Tom!'

'Please control your exuberation, Eddie,' said Tom, the bartender, and smiled broadly at Gloria and Liggett.

'Gimme a couple nickels, Tom, Laddy doo, Laddy doo.'

They looked at the man called Eddie, who was ~~down~~ at the other end of the bar, rubbing his fat hands ~~together and showing~~ his teeth. He had on a uniform cap and a ~~gray woolen sweater~~ and blue pants, and then they noticed he had a ~~small~~ twister, handcuffs, and other patrolman's ~~equipment~~. He ~~was~~ lay on a chair. 'I beg your pardon ~~for the noise~~.'

'Serve the lady and gentleman ~~fine~~.'

'I was doing that very thing,' said Tom, 'and when I get done I'll be giving you no nickels and stop askin'.'

'Laddy doo. Gimme a beer, my Far Doon friend,' said Eddie. 'After serving the lady and gentleman, of course.'

'When I get good and ready I'll give yiz a beer. It's almost time for you to ring in anyway. What about we taxpayers of this great city? When we go to exercise our franchise at the polls we'll change all this.'

'Civil Service. Did you never hear of the Civil Service, my laddy-buck? The members of the Finest are Civil Service and what the likes of you repeaters do at the polls affects us not one single iota. A beer!'

'Get outa here. Go on out and ring in. It's twenty-five to, time to box in.'

'The clock is fast.'

'God can strike me dead if it is. I fixed it meself comin' in this evening. Go on or you'll be wrote up again.'

'I'll go, and I'll be back with a hatful of nickels,' said Eddie. He pulled his equipment belt around and put on his tunic and straightened his cap and as he was leaving he said, 'Will I bring you a paper?'

'Go on, don't be trying to soft-soap me now,' said Tom.

A party of four young men came in and began to play very seriously a game with matches, for drinks. A man in an undershirt and black trousers, wearing a cap made out of neatly folded newspaper, came in and waved his hand to the match-game players, but sat alone. A man with his hat on the back of his head came in and spoke to the players and to the man with the newspaper cap. He sat alone and began making faces at himself in the mirror and went into a long story which Tom showed by nods that he was listening to. During the story the man never once took his eyes off his reflection in the mirror. Tom was attentive with the man who looked at himself, chatted about baseball with the man with the newspaper cap, kidded with the match-game players, and was courtly with Liggett and Gloria. The cop came back bearing several newspapers and a large paper bag, from which he took several containers. Out of these he poured stewed clams into dishes which Tom got out of the bottom of the free lunch bar. The cop said: 'Let the lady have hers first,' and then everyone else was

served while the cop looked on. He took the record out of the box and laid it on the back of a chair, and then he went over to the piano.

'Get away from that God damn piano,' said Tom. 'Don't give your pardon, Miss. Eddie, you lug you got a way from the piano, it's out of order.'

'You go to hell,' said Eddie. 'Beg your most humble pardon, Lady, I have some rights here.' The nickel he had dropped had set the motor humming, and in a minute the piano was playing the strains of 'Dinah, is there anyone finer?'

'Oh, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, the wrong record,' said the man in real pain. 'I wanted "Mother Machree".'

*

A special delivery letter which arrived at the home of Gloria Wandrous the next morning:

Dear Gloria - I see that you have not changed one whit your deplorable habit of breaking appointments, or did you not realize that we had an appointment today? I come, at great inconvenience, to New York today, hoping to see you on the matter which we are both anxious to settle. I brought with me the amount you specified, which is a large sum to be carrying about an one's person, especially in times like these.

Please try to be at home tomorrow (Monday) between 12 noon and 1 p.m., when I shall attempt to reach you by long distance telephone. If not, I shall try again at the same hour on Tuesday.

If you realized what inconvenience it costs me to come to New York you would be more considerate.

*Hastily,
J. E. R.*

Gloria read this letter late Monday afternoon, when she went home after spending the night with Liggett. 'Poor dear,' she said, upon reading the letter. 'If I realized what inconvenience, meeyah!'

Chapter 4

EDDIE BRUNNER was one of the plain Californians. He was one of those young men whose height and frame make them look awkward unless they are wearing practical yachting clothes, or a Stetson tailcoat. He did not gain much presence from his height, which was six feet two. When he talked standing up he made a gesture, always the same gesture; he put out his hands in the position of holding an imaginary basketball, about to shoot an imaginary foul. He could not talk with animation unless he stood up, but he did not often talk with animation. Like all Californians he made a substantive clause of every statement he made: 'It's going to rain today, is what I think . . . Herbert Hoover isn't going to be our next President, is my guess . . . I only have two bucks, is all.'

In his two years in New York he had had four good months, to make it five. At Stanford he was what is known as well liked, which tells a different story from popular. Popular men and women in college make a business of being popular. Well-liked people do things without getting disliked for them. Eddie Brunner drew funny pictures. He had a bigger vogue away from Stanford than at it, because the collegiate magazines republished his drawings. He had taken the work of several earlier collegiate comic artists, notably Taylor, of Dartmouth — and fashioned a distinctive comic type. He drew little men with googly eyes whose heads and bodies looked as though they had been pressed squat. He had a recognizable signature: a capital B and a line drawing of a runner. It was his only signature. It had to be because the men Eddie drew were so small. In college he drew no women if he could help it; with his technique women would have to have fat legs and squat little bodies. Occasionally he did a female head as illustration for He-he gags, most of which he wrote himself.

The *Stanford Chaparral*, as a result of Eddie's drawings, had a high unofficial rating among college humorous monthlies during the three years Eddie contributed to it. He did nothing in freshman year; he was just barely staying in college, what with his honesty, his fondness for certain phonograph records, and a girl.

When he got out of College, with the class of '29, he was secretly

envied by a good many classmates. Even the wealthy ones envied him. He had something; back east they knew about Eddie. Hadn't his drawings been in *Judge* and *College Humour* time after time? Eddie's father, a lucky sot who had made the fourth of a series of minor fortunes in miniature golf courses, had become bored with the golf courses and in the nick of time had converted them, wherever the zoning laws would permit, into drive-in car-service eateries, which were doing fabulous business in Eddie's last year in college. Brunner the elder was never so happy as when accompanying a party of 'sportsmen' and newspaper writers to a big fight back east. Jack Dempsey was a great friend of his. He himself was an alumnus of the University of Kansas, but he gave huge football parties at Stanford and then at the St Francis after the games. These did not embarrass Eddie, as Eddie had not joined his father's fraternity, and when the old gent came down to Stanford he called at his own fraternity and otherwise busied himself so that Eddie could follow his own plans. Eddie had for his father the distant tolerance that sometimes compensates for a lack of any other feeling, or, better yet, is a substitute for the contempt Eddie sometimes was in danger of feeling.

Eddie accepted his father's generosity with polite thanks, knowing that Brunner père spent every week in tips at least as much as the \$50 allowance he gave his son in senior year. Eddie spent his allowance on collectors' items among old Gennett records, and on his girl. Almost regularly every six months Eddie fell in love with a new girl, and he would be in love with her until some amatory crisis, such as a mid-year examination, would come. Then would take his mind off the girl, and he would resume his existence to find that he had been thoughtless about keeping dates, and he would have to get a new girl. With a good second-hand Packard phaeton and a seeming inability to get on without drink, his instinctive good manners and what the girls called his dry sense of humour, he could have just about his choice of the second-flight Stanford girls.

The idea was that the allowance was to enable him to come to New York and stay until he got a job. He had some money and some Bristol board and the rest of the things that a seaman's chest, and enough hand luggage to fill a trunk. Eddie and two cronies drove to New York.

His father had arranged with his secretary about the allowance, and so it came regularly. With the cronies he took an apartment in a good building in Greenwich Village, and each of the friends furnished a bedroom and divided the cost of furnishing the common living-room. They bought a bar, a quantity of gin, installed a larger electric icebox, and began doing the town. One of Eddie's roommates played pretty fair trombone, the other played a good imitative piano, and Eddie himself was fair on a tenor banjo with ukulele stringing. Eddie also purchased a slightly used mellophone, hoping to duplicate the performance of Dudley — in the Weems record of 'Travelin' Blues', which Eddie regarded as about as good a swing number as ever was pressed into a disc. He never learned to play the mellophone, but sometimes on Saturday and Sunday nights the three friends would have a jam session, the three of them playing and drinking gin and ginger ale and playing, complimenting each other on breaks and licks or making pained faces when one or the other would play very corny. One night their doorbell rang and a young man who looked as though he were permanently drunk asked if he could come in and sit down. He brought with him a beautiful little Jewess. Eddie was a little hesitant about letting them in until the drunk said he only wanted to sit and listen.

'WELL!' shouted the roommates. 'Sit you down, have a drink. Have two drinks. What would you like to hear?'

'“Ding Dong Daddy,”' said the stranger. 'My name is Malloy. This is Miss Green. Miss Green lives upstairs. She's my girl.'

'That's all right,' they said. 'Sit down, fellow, and we'll render one for you.' They played, and when they finished Miss Green and Malloy looked at each other and nodded.

'I have drums,' said Malloy.

'Where? Upstairs?' said Eddie.

'Oh, no. Miss Green and I don't live together that much, do we, Sylvia?'

'Not that much. Almost but not quite,' said Sylvia.

'Where are they, the percussions?' said Eddie.

'At home in Pennsylvania, where I come from,' said Malloy.

'But I'll get them next week. Now do you mind if Sylvia plays?'

The boy with the trombone offered her his trombone. Eddie handed up the banjo.

'No,' said Malloy. 'Piano.'

'Oh, piano. That means I mix drinks,' said the boy at the piano.

'Yes, I guess it does after you hear Sylvia,' said Malloy.

'As good as that?' said the trombone player.

'Go ahead, Sylvia,' said Malloy.

'I ought to have another drink first.'

'Give her another drink,' said Eddie. 'Here, have mine.'

She gulped the drink and took off her rings and handed them to Malloy. 'Don't forget where they came from,' she said. 'And a cigarette.' Malloy lit a cigarette for her and she took two long drags.

'She better be good,' said one roommate to the other.

Then with her two tiny hands she hit three chords, all in the bass, one, two, three. 'Jazz!' yelled the Californians, and got up and stood behind her.

She played for an hour. While she played one thing the Californians would be making lists for her to play when she got finished. At the end of the hour she wanted to stop and they would not let her. 'All right,' she said. 'I'll do my impressions. My first impression is Vincent Lopez playing "Viola".'

'All right, you can quit,' said Eddie.

'None too soon,' she said. 'Where is the little girls' room, quick.'

'What does she do? Who is she? What does she do for a living?' the Californians wanted to know.

'She's a comparison shopper at Macy's,' said Malloy.

'What is that?'

'A comparison shopper,' said Malloy. 'She goes around the other stores finding out if they're underselling Macy's, that's all.'

'But she ought to. How did you ever get to know her?' said the piano player.

'Listen, I don't like your tone, see? She's my girl, and I am a very tough guy.'

'Oh, I don't think you're so tough. Big, but not so tough, is my guess.'

'No, not so tough, but plenty tough enough for you,' said Malloy, and got up and swung at the piano player. The trombone player grabbed Malloy's arms. The piano player had caught the blow on his upraised forearm.

'I'm for letting them fight,' said Eddie. But he was not.

Malloy. 'Listen, fellow, you're one to three here and we'd just give you a shellacking and throw you downstairs if we had to. But we wouldn't have to. My friend here is a fighter.'

'Make them shake hands,' said the trombone player.

'What for?' said Eddie. 'Why should they shake hands?'

'Let him go,' said the piano player.

'All right, let him go,' said Eddie to the trombone player. They let him go and Malloy went in after the piano player and stopped suddenly and fell and sat on the floor.

'You shouldn't have done that,' said the trombone player.

'Why not?' said the piano player.

'Why not? He asked for it,' said Eddie.

'Well, he's plastered,' said the trombone player.

'He'll be all right. I'm afraid,' said the piano player. He went over and bent down and spoke to Malloy. 'How you coming, K.O.?'

'Um all right. You the one that hit me?' said Malloy, gently caressing his jawbone.

'Yes. Here, take my hand. Get up before your girl gets back.'

'Who? Oh, Sylvia. Where is she?'

'She's still in the can.'

Malloy got up slowly but unassisted. He sat in a deep chair and accepted a drink. 'I think I could take you, sober.'

'No. No. Get that idea out of your head,' said the piano player.

'Don't be patronizing,' said Malloy.

'He can afford to be patronizing,' said Eddie. 'My friend is one of the best amateur lightweights on the Coast. Do you know where the Coast is?'

'Aw, why don't you guys cut it out. Leave him alone,' said the trombone player.

Sylvia appeared. 'Did you think I got stuck? I couldn't find the bathroom light. Why, Jimmy, what's the matter?'

'I walked into a punch.'

'Who? Who hit him? You? You big wall-eyed son of a bitch?'

'No, not me,' said the trombone player.

'Then who did? You! I can tell, you sorehead, because I showed you how to play piano you had to assert your superiority some way, so you take a sock at a drunk. Come on, Jimmy, let's get out of here. I told you I didn't want to come here in the first place.'

'Wait a second, Baby. Don't get the wrong idea. It was my fault.'

'Stop being a God-damn gentleman. It ill becomes you. Come on, or I'll go alone and I won't let you in, either.'

'I'll go, but I was in the wrong and I want to say so. I apologize to you, Whatever Your Name Is -'

'Brunner.'

'And you, and you, and thank you for being - Anyway, I apologize.'

'All right.'

'But I still think I could take you.'

'Oh, now wait a minute, listen here,' said the piano player. 'If you want to settle this right now I'll go outside, or right here -'

'Oh, shut up,' said Eddie. 'You're as bad as he is. Good night. Good night.' When the door closed he turned on the piano player. 'He was all right at the end. He apologized, and you can't blame him for wanting to think he could lick you.'

'A wrong guy. If I ever see him again I'll punch his face in for him.'

'Maybe. Maybe it wouldn't be so easy if he was sober. He had to walk on a loose rug to take that haymaker at you, remember. I don't want to hear any more about it. The hell with it.'

'Ah, you give me a pain in the ass.'

'You took the very words right out of my mouth. All you tough guys,' said Eddie.

'Gee, but that little Mocky could play that piano,' said the trombone player.

That was the first of two meetings between Eddie Brunner and Jimmy Malloy. Eddie's life went on as usual for a while. He did a few drawings and sold none. His stuff was too good for a syndicate manager to take a chance on it; too subtle. But it was not the type of thing that belonged in the *New Yorker*, the only other market he could think of at the time. So the three friends would have their jam sessions, and some night when they did not play they would sit and talk. The names they would talk: Bix Beiderbecke, Frankie Trumbauer, Miff Mole, Steve Brown, Bob MacDonough, Henry Busse, Mike Pingatore, Ross Gorman and Benny Goodman, Louis Armstrong and Arthur Shutt, Roy Bargy and Eddie Gilligan, Harry MacDonald and Eddie Lang and Tommy and Jimmy

Dorsey and Fletcher Henderson, Rudy Wiedoeft and Isham Jones, Rube Bloom and Hoagy Carmichael, Sonny Greer and Fats Waller, Husk O'Hare and Duilio Sherbo, and other names like Mannie Kline and Louis Prima, Jenney and Morehouse, Venuti, Signorelli and Cress, Peewee Russell and Larry Binion; and some were for this one and some for that one, and all the names meant something as big as Wallenstein and Flonzaley and Ganz do to some people.

Early in October of that year Eddie got a telegram from his mother: PAPA DIED OF A STROKE THIS MORNING FUNERAL SATURDAY PLEASE COME. Eddie counted the words. He knew his mother; she probably thought the indefinite article did not cost anything in a telegram. He overdrew at the bank and cashed a cheque large enough to take him home, cashed it in an uptown speakeasy where he was known. He went home, and his maternal uncle told him how his father had died; in the middle, or the beginning maybe, of a party in a Hollywood hotel, surrounded by unknown Hollywood characters. They kept that from Eddie's mother, who had been such a sad stupid little woman for so many years that she could have taken it without shock. All she said, over and over again, as they made plans for the funeral was: 'I don't know. Roy always said he wanted to be buried with the Shrine

available corner; showing newsreels and short subjects for a nickel. A half-hour show, and turn them out. That did not give them much for their money, as it meant only one short and two newsreels, but on the other hand it was a lot for their money. A nickel? What did they want for a nickel? It was only a time killer anyway. He was in Hollywood ostensibly working on this project at the time the grim reaper called. No papers had been signed, and he hadn't seen the top men, but he was going to let them know he was in town tomorrow or the day after, and this party was just a little informal get-together with a couple of football coaches and golf professionals and what are known in the headlines as Film Actresses - extra girls. He had all the confidence in the world, and not without some reason. A man who is able to show the motion picture producers one example of how he called the turn of the public fancy can sell them practically anything, so long as he calls it Showmanship. But no papers had been signed.

'Your mother's going to stay with Aunt Ella and me for the present,' Eddie's uncle told him, and that settled a problem for Eddie. He did not want to stay around his mother. He loved her because she was his mother and sometimes he felt sorry for her, but all his life (he had realized at a time when he was still too young for such a realization) she was so engrossed in her own life work of observing the carryings-on of her husband, that she was like some older person whom Eddie knew but who did not always speak to him on the street. She was a member of a Pioneer Family, which in California means what Mayflower Descendant means in the east. The Mayflower Descendants, however, have had time to rest and recover from the exhausting, cruel trip, and many have done so, although inbreeding did not speed recovery. But the Pioneers had a harder trip and not so long ago, and it is reasonable to suppose that many of their number were so weakened when they got as far as the Pacific littoral that they handed down a legacy of tired bodies. Roy Brunner had come out from Kansas on a train, and his wife became his wife - a little to his surprise - the first time he asked her. She'd never been asked before, and was afraid she never would be again. She would willingly have learned, in married life, the one important thing her husband was able to teach her, but he was tolerantly impatient with her, and went elsewhere for his fun. When it came time to acquaint Eddie with

the facts of sexual life, and Roy acquainted him with them, his wife said to him: 'How did you tell him?' The reason she asked was that she still had hopes at that time of finding out herself. But Roy's answer was: 'Oh, I just told him. He knew a lot already.'

Eddie knew that in his mother his uncle was figuring on a profitable paying guest. That annoyed him a little, but what was there to do? She wanted to be there, and it took care of everything satisfactorily. Mrs Brunner gave Eddie five hundred dollars out of her own money, and having signed a power of attorney in favour of his uncle, Eddie returned to New York, believing that his allowance would continue.

It never came again. His father's estate was tangled enough, and the Crash fixed everything fine. Eddie's uncle was hit, though not crippled. He wrote to Eddie, who was a month and a half behind in the rent with a lease to run exactly a year longer. He told Eddie they all were comparatively lucky. 'You are young,' he said, 'and can earn your own living. I hope you will be able to send your mother something from time to time, as we can give her a roof over her head, a place to sleep and eat but nothing else. . . .'

Eddie sold his car for \$35, he hocked his beautiful mellophone for \$10. He gathered together, early in December, all his money and found he had not quite \$200. His roommates had jobs and they were more than willing to have him keep his share of the apartment and owe them his share of the rent, but in January one of them lost his job in the first Wall Street purge, and in March they all were ousted from their apartment.

They went their separate ways. One of the roommates had a married sister living somewhere in suburban New Jersey. He went there. The other, the fighter, died of pneumonia in a room off Avenue A. Eddie did not even hear about it until long after his friend's body had been cremated. Eddie went from rooming-house to rooming-house, in the Village at first, and then in the West Forties, among the Irish of Tenth Avenue. He stayed uptown because it saved a dime carfare every day. He tried every place, everyone he knew to get a job. He was a helper in a restaurant one week, picking dirty plates off tables and carrying trayfuls of them to the kitchen. He dropped a tray and was fired, but he paid something on his rent and he had kept his belly full. He thought of driving a taxi, but he did not know how to go about

it. He knew there had to be licences and other details, and he did not have the money for a licence. He tried to be an actor, saying he could play comedy character parts. The only time he was picked he revealed right away that he had had no experience: he did not know what a side was, nor anything else about the stage. One night, very hungry, he allowed himself to be *picked up by a fairy*, but he wanted his meal first and the fairy did not trust him, so he punched the fairy one for luck and felt better, but wished he had had the guts to take the fairy's bankroll. He sold twenty-five cent ties in fly-by-night shops and was a shill at two auctions but the auctioneer decided he was too tall; people would remember him. Then, through his landlady, for whose children he sometimes drew funny pictures, he heard of a marvellous opportunity: night man in a hotel which was more of a whore-house. It was through her Tammany connexion that she heard about the job. He operated a switchboard and ran the elevator from six in the evening to eight in the morning, for ten dollars a week and room, plus tips. Customers would come in and the password was, 'I'm a friend of Mr Stone's.' Then Eddie would look the customer over and ask him whom he wanted to see, and the man would give the name of one of the three women. Eddie then would call the room of the woman named, and say: 'There's a friend of Mr Stone's here for you,' and she would say all right, and Eddie would say: 'She says she's not sure she remembers you. Will you describe her to me?' And the man would either describe her or say quite frankly that he'd never been there before, and all this was stalling. It gave Eddie a chance to look him over carefully and it gave the woman a chance to prepare to entertain the visitor, or get dressed and get ready to be raided, if Eddie pulled back the switchboard key which rang her room. He was instructed to turn down men who were too drunk, as the place was not paying the kind of protection that had to be paid by clip joints. Eddie never turned anyone down.

On this job he met Gloria. She came in one night, plastered, with a sunburned man, also plastered, who wore in his lapel the boutonniere of the Legion of Honour. Eddie was a little afraid of him at first, but he guessed it would be too early in the season for a cop to have the kind of tan this man had. And the man said: 'Tell Jane it's the major. She'll know.' Jane knew and told Eddie to send him right up. The girl, Gloria, went with him. Eddie made

the wise guess that this was Gloria's first time here, but not her first experience being a spectator. The major kept smiling to himself in the elevator, humming, and saying to Gloria: 'All right, honey?'

The major gave Eddie a dollar when they reached Jane's floor, gave it to him as though that were the custom from time immemorial. Eddie returned to the switchboard. Then in about twenty minutes he heard footsteps, and standing before him was the girl, Gloria.

'Will you lend me that dollar he gave you?' she said. 'Come on, I'll give it back to you. You don't want any trouble, do you?'

'No. But how'll I know you'll give it back to me? Honestly, I need that buck.'

'You don't have to pimp for your money, I imagine.'

'That's where you're wrong, but here, take it.'

'I'll bring it back tomorrow. I'll give you two bucks tomorrow,' she said. 'What are you doing here, anyway?'

'You mean what is a nice girl like me doing in a place like this,' said Eddie.

'Good night,' she said, 'and thanks a million.'

He had a feeling she would return the money, and she did, two nights later. She gave him five dollars. She said she didn't have change for it, and he took it. 'What happened the other night, anything?' she said.

'Your friend got stinko and Jane had to send out for a bouncer,' he said.

'Oh, you're not the bouncer?'

'Do I look like a bouncer?'

'No, but -'

'But I don't look like an elevator boy in a whore-house either, is what you're trying to say.'

'Are you from the west?'

'Wisconsin,' said Eddie.

'What part of Wisconsin?'

'Duluth,' said Eddie.

'Duluth is in Minnesota.'

'I know,' said Eddie.

'Oh, in other words mind my own business. Okay. Well, I just asked. I'll be seeing you.'

'I have something belonging to you, Miss Wandrous.'

'What!'

'Your purse, you left it in Jane's room when you left in such a hurry. That's why you had to borrow the buck, remember? I took the liberty of trying to identify the owner, but I couldn't find you in the phone book. I didn't think I would.'

'Oh!'

'I was going to take a chance that you were still living at the address on your driver's licence. You better get a new licence, by the way. The 1928 licences aren't any good any more. This is 1930.'

'Did you show this to anybody?'

'No.'

'Why not?'

'I just didn't think it was anybody else's business. It wasn't mine, for that matter, but it's better for you to have *me* look at it than turn it over to, well, one of the boys we have around here sometimes.'

'You're a good egg. I just happened to think who it is you remind me of.'

'I know.'

'Do you?'

'I ought to. I've heard it often enough.'

'Who?'

'Lindbergh.'

'Yes, that's right. I guess you would hear that a lot. When is your night off?'

'The second Tuesday of every week.'

'No night off? I thought they had to give you a night off.'

'They break a lot of ordinances here, ordinances and laws. Why, what do you want to know about my nights out for?'

'We could have dinner.'

'Sure. Do you think I'd be here if I could take girls out to dinner?'

'Who said anything about taking me? I just said we could have dinner. I have no objection to paying for my own ~~dinner~~ under certain circumstances.'

'For instance.'

'For instance eating with someone I like.'

'Now we're getting somewhere,' he said, but he could not prolong the flippancy. This was the first time in months that anyone had spoken a kind personal word to him. She understood that.

'Get somebody to work for you, can't you?'

'Why should I? . . . Hell, why shouldn't I? There's a juggaboom had this job before me is working down the street now. He just runs the elevator at a hotel now, maybe he might work for me if they said it was all right. I don't want to lose this job, though.'

The Negro said he would be glad to take over Eddie's job for a night, and Mrs Smith, Eddie's boss, said it would be all right but not to make a practice of it, as the girls upstairs did not like Negroes for agents.

Thus began the friendship of Gloria and Eddie.

*

It would be easy enough to say any one of a lot of things about Gloria, and many things were said. It could be said that she was a person who in various ways - some of them peculiar - had the ability to help other people, but lacked the ability to help herself. Someone could write a novel about Gloria without ever going very far from that thesis. It was, of course, the work of a few minutes for the 1931 editorial writers (who apparently are the very last people to read the papers) to find in Gloria a symbol of modern youth. She was no more a symbol of modern youth than Lindbergh was a symbol of modern youth, or Bob Jones the golfer, or Prince George, or Rudy Vallée, or Linky Mitchell, or DeHart Hubbard or anyone else who happened to be less than thirty years old up to 1930. There can be no symbol of modern youth any more than there can be a symbol of modern middle age, and anyway symbol is a misnomer. The John Held Jr caricature of the 'flapper' of the 1920s, or the girls and young men whom Scott Fitzgerald made self-conscious were not symbols of the youth of that time. As a matter of fact there was no tie-up between the Scott Fitzgerald people and the John Held people. The Scott Fitzgerald people were drawn better by two artists named Lawrence Fellows and Williamson than by John Held. Held drew caricatures of the boys and girls who went to East Orange High School and the University of Illinois; the Held drawings were caricatures and popular,

and so people associated the Fitzgerald people with the Held drawings. The Fitzgerald people did not go in for decorated yellow slickers, decorated Fords, decorated white duck trousers and stuff like put-and-take tops and fraternity pins and square-toed shoes and Shifter movements and trick dancing and all the things that caught on with the Held people. The Held people *tried* to look like the Held people; the Fitzgerald-Fellows people were copies of the originals.

The average man, Mr Average Man, Mr Taxpayer, as drawn by Rollin Kirby *looks* like the average New York man making more than \$5,000 a year. He wears Brooks clothes, including a Herbert Johnson hat, which is a pretty foreign-looking article of apparel in Des Moines, Iowa, where J. N. Darling is the cartoonist; but in New York, Kirby's territory, the Kirby taxpayer is typical. He is a man who wears good clothes without ever being a theatre-programme well-dressed man; it is easy to imagine him going to his dentist, taking his wife to the theatre, going back to Amherst for reunion, getting drunk twice a year, having an operation for appendicitis, putting aside the money to send his son to a good prep school, seeing about new spectacles, and looking at, without always being on the side of, the cartoons of Rollin Kirby. But no one would call this man a symbol of middle age or American Taxpayer. If he walked along the streets of Syracuse or Wheeling or Terre Haute he would be known as a stranger. He would be picked out as a stranger from a bigger city, and probably picked as a New Yorker. And a Held flapper would have embarrassed any young snob who took her to a Princeton prom. And a Fellows young man, driving up in his Templar phaeton to the Pi Beta Phi house at a Western Conference University would have been spotted by the sorority girls even before they saw the Connecticut licence on his car. There *are* typical men and women, young and old, but only editorial writers would be so sweeping as to pick out a certain girl or a certain boy and call him a symbol of modern youth.

There could be a symbol of modern young womanhood, but the newspapers would not be likely to print her picture. She would have to be naked. The young girl who was about twenty years old in the latter half of the 1920s did conform to a size. She was about five feet five, she weighed about 110. She had a good body. There

must be a reason for the fact that so many girls fitted that description, without regard to their social classification. And the reason may well be that between 1905 and 1915 the medical profession used approximately the same system in treating pregnant women and in the feeding and care of infants. Even the children of Sicilian and Ghetto parentage suddenly grew taller, so the system must have been standard; there seems to be no other explanation for this uniformity. It is noticeable in large families: the younger children, born during and after the World War, are almost invariably tall and slender and healthier than their older brothers and sisters.

Gloria missed by ten years being a 'flapper'; that is, if she had been born ten years sooner she might have qualified in 1921 as a flapper, being twenty-two years old, and physically attractive. One of the differences between Gloria as she was and as she might have been was that in 1921 she might have been 'considered attractive by both sexes', and in 1931 she was considered attractive by both sexes, but with a world of difference in the meaning and inner understanding of it.

It has been hinted before that there was a reason for the recurring mood of despair which afflicted Gloria. When Gloria was eleven years old she was corrupted by a man old enough to be her father. At that time Gloria and her mother and uncle were living in Pittsburgh. Her father, a chemist, had been one of the first people to die of radium poisoning. The word father, spoken with any tenderness or sentimental intent, always evoked a recollection of her father's college class picture. It was the only picture her mother had of her father, as something had happened to their wedding pictures when they were moving from one house to another. The class picture was not much help to a child who wanted to be like other children; she saw her father as a man with a white circle around his head, in the second row of three rows of young men standing on the steps of a stone building. Through her childhood she could not see a haloed saint's picture without thinking of the picture of her father, but she would wonder why the halo did not go around the front and under the chin of the saint, and why the white circle around her father's head did not end at the shoulders the way it did with the saints; and thinking first one thing and then the other she never thought of her father as a saint;

and never thought of the saints except as ~~men~~ ~~men~~ ~~men~~

Her uncle, a man named William R. Vandamm (his name was Pierre), was the older brother of her mother. He had been a classmate of Gloria's father at Cornell University, and Gloria's father had gone to Chile after college, and had stayed long enough to hate it jointly and break their common ties. They came back together and Wandrous married Vandamm's sister. There was a little money on all sides, and both bride and groom brought equal advantages to the union, and it was one of those obscure, respectable marriages that take place every Sunday. When Wandrous died it was Vandamm who went to the radium company and used his Masonic and professional and political connexions to see to it that money was provided for the upbringing and education of Gloria. They wanted to give the widow stock in the radium company, but Vandamm was too smart for that and thereby lost close to a million dollars, as it later turned out, but Vandamm was the only one who noticed that, and he did not call his sister's attention to it.

Vandamm was a good enough industrial chemist, and a very good uncle. He lived away most of the time while Gloria was a small child. He would take a job, hold it a year or so, and then take a better job, gaining in money and experience and acquaintance. He would live in men's clubs and Y.M.C.A.s all over the country, taking half of his annual vacation at Christmas so that he could spend the holidays with his sister and niece. He would bring home beautiful presents, usually picked by one of the succession of nice young women to whom he was attentive. In every town where he worked it was the same. He was clean and respectable and had a good job, and he was unmarried. So he would single out one of the young women he met, and he would be polite to her and take her to nice dances and send her flowers, and tell her all the time what a wonderful thing this friendship was. Each time he quit his job and moved to another town he would leave behind a bewildered young woman, who had had him to her house for Sunday dinner fifty times in a year, but had nothing to show for it, candy and flowers being the perishable things that they are. There were two exceptions: one was a young woman who fell in love with him and did not care how much she showed it. He had to depart from his Platonic policy in her case, because she was making what were

then known as goo-goo eyes at him every time she saw him, at parties or alone. At the risk of not being permitted to finish, he told her that she had made him feel as no other girl had made him feel, and for that reason he was quitting his job at the factory. If he stayed on, he said, he would be tempted to ask her something he had no right to ask her. Why had he no right to ask her? she wanted to know. Because of his sister and his niece. They had only what money he could give them, and never would have more. For that reason he hated to quit this job; he had been able to do things for them that he never had been able to do before. 'I will never marry,' he stated, as though it had national political significance. That fixed her. It also fixed him; instead of making him less attractive it made him look tall and husky, a philanthropist who gave millions in secret. It made her feel something she never had felt before. Before that she and all women like her were a little afraid that all bachelors were comparing all eligible women. But William he wasn't comparing. He had decided on her, even though he could not, because of his dependants, have her. It turned out to be only a question of time before he did have her. 'Take me,' she said, one moonlight night, and she threw her arms back. He wasn't quite ready to take her at that moment, but he was in a minute. For the rest of that year he would take her every Sunday night, after paying a visit to a drug store in another part of town every Saturday night. In nice weather they would wander casually in the backyard and dart suddenly into the carriage house. In bad weather they would have to wait until her father and mother had gone to bed, and then they would go down cellar. They would leave a scrub-bucket just inside the cellar door so that if anyone started to come down, whoever it was would knock the bucket down the steps with a warning racket. It was better in the carriage house, as she did not get her petticoat so dusty in a barouche as on the cellar floor.

The second exception was the girl in the next town he came to. He fell in love with her and asked her to marry him. She turned him down with such finality that she was sorry for him and suggested that they could still be friends. He snatched at this eagerly, and there was nothing he would not do for her. Years later he read about her. She and a married man, a doctor in the same 'set', died together in a Chicago hotel. The doctor shot her through the heart and then turned the revolver on himself. That, after all those years,

made Vandamm understand why she would not have him; there was someone else.

The arrival of the World War was propitious for Vandamm, who was getting a little tired of all but the freedom part of his freedom. He was beginning to hate the visits to the drug store on Saturday night; he hated not being able to go right to sleep; he hated keeping his mind active so that he would not be led into a proposal of marriage. He detested the little university club he lived in. He hated American accents. In no town that he ever lived in had he made an impression on the first three families. He could see, when he met them, how they regarded him: an easterner who wasn't good enough for the east and thought he would be a king among monkeys rather than a monkey among kings. He decided he had had enough experience, and from now on would make money.

He went to Pittsburgh and had no trouble getting a job. In the war years he made excellent salaries and he and his sister bought a house in the East End. It turned out that he had to move again, this time to Wilmington, Delaware, but his visits home – and he thought of it as home – were more frequent than they had been. One of the results of these frequent visits was his discovering that he adored his niece. He never would have put it that way. Even love was a word he had schooled himself against using. But he began to look forward to seeing her every time she was out of his sight. Here was someone he could love without watching what he said and did. It was such a relief after the long cautious years. What started it was the child's beauty, and he took pride in the relationship. She photographed well and he carried snapshots of her in his wallet. He was glad she was not his daughter, because he could love her more. Fathers *have to* love their daughters and sometimes there is nothing else, but an uncle can love his little niece, and they can be friends, and she will listen to him and he can be as extravagant with her as he pleases. His sister was in favour of this obvious enthusiasm on the part of her brother, although she was not unaware that her brother more and more gave to her the status of a privileged governess.

The war, his work, the money it brought him – they were half his life. Gloria was the other half, that he did not talk much about.

He took his sister's money and doubled it for her, not really for

her but for Gloria. Then when he saw what he had done, he had what he thought was a brilliant idea. For the first time in his life he indulged the dangerous thrill of planning someone else's life. He wanted to get his sister married off. That would be all for the present. Get her married off, and then see what happened. But he could not stop thinking what might happen, and did not see why he should not enjoy his plans. His sister was young enough to have children, and if she had a child, a new baby, with a living husband, there was no telling what might happen. He reasoned that his sister ought to be glad to let him have Gloria. She would have a child of her own, and he would have Gloria. He would think later on about marriage for himself. If the right woman came along and Gloria liked her, and he liked her for Gloria, he might marry her. In the course of a few months of thinking along these lines Vandamm planned a whole new life for himself. He thought of it only as rearranging his own life, and never as deliberate, planned rearranging of the lives of anyone else, except little Gloria, who was, after all, so young. . . .

In Wilmington he had met a man, a major in the Army Ordnance Department. Major Boam was not like most of the men who without previous military experience walked into captaincies and majorities in the Ordnance Department and Quartermaster and Medical Corps; he looked well in uniform. He looked fit, healthy, strong. This man worked out of Washington, and spent most of his time in Wilmington, Eddystone, Bethlehem, and Pittsburgh. Vandamm remained a civilian all through the war. He was near-sighted, underweight, flat-footed, and the Army didn't want him. Not that they were rude about it; they wanted him to remain a civilian.

'Next time you're in Pittsburgh stop in and see my sister,' Vandamm told Major Boam. The major said he would be glad to, and did, and when next he saw Vandamm he said he had stopped in and had dinner with Mrs Wandrous, a very nice dinner. Vandamm wanted to know if he had seen Gloria, but the major said he had been so late that Gloria had been asleep, oh, hours, when he got there. To Vandamm that meant that Boam had arrived late and must have enjoyed himself if he stayed, and he found out that Boam had stayed until almost train-time.

Boam was a widower with a grown daughter. Must have married

very young, Vandamm decided, to have had a daughter old enough to be married. The daughter lived in Trenton, but Boam never saw her. 'She has her own household to look after now,' Boam said. 'I don't like to go there as a father-in-law.' It sounded a little as though Boam were lonely, and that fitted in with Vandamm's plans. A lonely widower, young-middle-aged, well set up, good job probably if they gave him a major's commission right off the bat. 'How'd you like Major Boam?' Vandamm asked his sister. She liked him, she said. She judged men by their size. She liked a tall man better than a short man, and a tall husky man better than a tall thin man.

The Armistice interfered with Vandamm's plans. Major Boam took off his Sam Browne belt, his boots and spurs, his uniform with its two silver chevrons on the left sleeve. He stopped in to see Vandamm in Wilmington on his last trip around his circuit, and for the first time in the friendship he relaxed. Leading up to it in the most roundabout way, he finally said to Vandamm: 'Well, it's time I went out looking for a job.' It developed that Boam was not going back to some highly-paid position. He was not going back to anything. He told Vandamm that when the United States entered the war he wanted to be a dollar-a-year man, but that he couldn't afford it. He had had expenses in connexion with his daughter's marriage, and a lot of other things. The only way he could serve his country was to get a commission. Working for a major's pay was a financial loss, he said, and as much as he could do for his country. And now there was no job waiting for him.

This suited Vandamm. He told the major he would see to it that he got a job. The major thanked him and said he would try to use his own connexions first, and if nothing came of them Vandamm was not to be surprised if one fine day Boam turned up in Pittsburgh or Wilmington.

He turned up in 1921, not to ask for a job, but just to pay a social call. He had found a vague job with the political end of the chemical game, he said. The vague job was lobbying. Peace with Germany was about to be signed, and it was his job to see to it that when the German dye factories reopened they did not wreck the American dye industry, such as it was. This was difficult, he pointed out, because many of the German factories were American-owned, or had been until war was declared, and American

had to move carefully. There were some Americans who wanted their plants back nearly intact, and it was going to be a risky business if the Germans saw that the German dye industry was going to be discriminated against. Official Germany would not dare do anything, but the workers in the German dye factories could not be counted on to keep their sabotaging hands off the factories if they heard that their means of livelihood was being cut off in the American Congress. In other words there were two camps in America; one camp, those who had owned factories in Germany, didn't want Congress to take any tariff action until after they saw what was going to happen about the plants. The other camp consisted of the Americans who had more or less entered the dye industry for the first time when the British navy bottled up German maritime activity. These Americans had spent a lot of money building up our dye industry (under the tremendous handicap that the trade secrets of dye manufacture were kept in Germany), and they didn't want to see their money go to waste just because Germany was licked. What was the use of winning the God-damn war if we couldn't get something out of it?

And so Major Boam - who retained his military title partly because the hotel and restaurant people in Washington knew him as Major Boam, and partly because he thought it gave him standing with members of Congress - had been staying in Washington ever since the Harding Administration moved in. He spoke fraternally of Congress: 'We're getting a lot of work done down there. You wouldn't believe it the amount of work we're getting done - why, who is this?'

'This is Gloria. Say how do you do to Major Boam,' said Mrs Wandrous.

'How do you do,' said Gloria.

'Come here till I have a look at you,' said the major. He held out his hands, his big brown fat hands. 'Say, this is quite a young lady. How old is she? How old are you, Gloria?'

'I'm almost twelve,' she said.

'Come up here,' he said. 'Sit on my lap.'

'Oh now, Major, she'll be a nuisance,' said Mrs Wandrous.

'Well, if the Major wants her,' said Vandamm. 'Go on, Gloria, be sociable.'

'Shooooor she will,' said Major Boam. 'Ups!' He picked her up

and sat her down on his left leg. He held his left hand on her back and went on talking. As he talked his hands moved, now he would pat and squeeze her bare thighs, now he would pat her little behind. She looked up at him as he did these things, and he went on talking so interestedly and in such a strong, easy voice that she relaxed and laid her head on his shoulder. She liked the pressure of his hands, which did not hurt her the way some people's did. She liked the rumble of his voice and the smell of his clean white shirt and the feel of his soft flannel suit.

'Look,' said Vandamm, interrupting and indicating with a nod how relaxed Gloria was.

Boam nodded and smiled and continued what he was saying. In a little while Gloria fell asleep — it was past her bedtime. Her mother picked her up off Boam's lap, and Boam immediately jumped up.

He tried to stay away from the Wandrous-Vandamm home after that, but the harder he tried, the more excuses he invented. He would plan to go there after he was sure Gloria would be asleep; but then he would be saying: 'How's little Gloria?' and Vandamm would immediately say: 'Come up and see her when she's asleep.' Boam had business in Pittsburgh that was supposed to keep him there three or four days. He stayed a fortnight. All the time he knew what was happening to him. He did not know what he wanted to do with the child. He did know that he wanted to take her away, be alone with her.

Up to that time Gloria had been only another beautiful child, with a head of dark brown curly hair, and eyes that were startlingly beautiful at first glance, and then the longer you looked at them the more uninteresting they became. But each time you saw them anew you would be seeing for the first time how beautiful they were. Their beauty was in the set and the colour, and being dark brown and the eyes of a child, they did not change much and that was what made them uninteresting. Gloria was like most female children. She was cruel to animals, especially to dogs. She was not at all afraid of them until after they had made friends with her and then she would hit them with a stick, and after that she would be afraid of them, although for the benefit of her elders she would call nice doggy. A Negro hired girl named Martha would come out from Wiley Avenue every afternoon to take Gloria for her walk.

The other children's nurses were white and they did not encourage the coloured girl to sit with them. They did like to have pretty little Gloria with them, and pretty little Gloria knew this, knew that her company was preferable to Martha's, so Martha had no control over her. Her mother did not try to exercise any control over her, except to see that she always looked nice before she went out. Barring only an occasional enema and trips to the dentist, Gloria's childhood was lived according to Gloria's rules. School was easy for her; she was bright, and any little brightness she displayed was rewarded out of proportion to its worth. She liked all little boys until they played rough, and she would fight any little boy who was being mean to a little girl, any little girl. There was one continual paradox all through her childhood: for a child who frequently heard herself called a little Princess she was very neglected. She had no one to create or to generate childhood love.

On the way out to Gloria's home Boam did not allow himself to think of what might happen, of what he hoped would happen. He had been out to the house every second day while he was in Pittsburgh, but this one sunny day he knew was to be the day. He knew he was going to do something. It was after lunch, and he had a hunch Mrs Wandrous would be out. She was. The maid who answered the door knew him, and when he did not seem disposed to leave when she said Mrs Wandrous was out, she asked him to come in. 'You don't know what time she'll be back?' he said.

'No, sir, but I don't imagine for quite a while. She went all the way downtown shopping. You only missed her by about a half an hour. Can I get you a cup of tea or something?'

'No, thanks, you go ahead with whatever you were doing. I'll just sit down a little while and if Mrs Wandrous doesn't come along. . . . Little Gloria out playing?'

'No, sir, she's in. The nurse-girl didn't come today. I'll send her in.'

'I'd like to say good-bye to her. I'm leaving tonight.'

The maid was only too glad to get rid of Gloria. She had her own work to do and Mrs Wandrous did not accept excuses when it wasn't done.

Gloria came running in and then stopped short and looked at him. Then she smiled faintly.

'How's my little girl today?' he said.

'Very well, thank you,' she said.

'Come here and I'll read you the funny section,' he said, and picked up the paper. He nodded to the maid, who left.

Gloria went to him and stood between his legs while he sat and read comic strips. She had an attitude of attention, but no attraction in her eyes. The pressure of her elbow on his leg was becoming unbearable, and he looked into her eyes as he would have looked into a woman's. She showed no fear. Was it possible that this child had - was Vandamm the kind of man - did that explain Vandamm's adoration of this child?

He stopped reading the paper. 'Let me feel your muscle,' he said. She made a muscle for him. 'Mm,' he said. 'That's a good muscle for a girl.' Then a silence.

'All ready for the summer, aren't you?' he said.

'Yes,' she said.

'Not much on,' he said. Then panic and fright and haste came on him, and his hands went wild. He held her so hard on the mouth that he hurt her and she could say nothing else was going on, but she knew enough to struggle.

He tried to pass it off with acrobatics. He ~~was in the air~~ and spoke to her and tried to laugh. He ~~wanted to get out of~~ this house, but he was afraid. He had not ~~done anything to~~ her, but he was afraid of the story she ~~might tell~~ leave until he was sure she would not ~~run away~~ and babble something to the maid. ~~Then he said to her~~ kissed you good-bye now, so I guess I'll ~~be going~~

She did not know what was the reason

'You going to miss me?' he said. 'Next time I come back. What will you be doing then?'

'I don't know,' she said.

'Well, I'll bring you some from New York, next time I see you about it?'

'Yes,' she said.

'Are you going to say ~~the same thing~~

'Yes,' she said.

‘Well.’

"Bye," she said.

'Tha-a-at's right. ~~Good~~ _____

uncle I said good-bye to them, too.' He was tempted to give her money but some kind of hog's caution prevailed. He went away and he never came back, but he was remembered.

Gloria wanted to tell someone what he had done. The minute he left she forgot how he had hurt her with his teeth. She remembered his hand. She went to the kitchen and stood watching the maid, who was polishing silverware. She watched the maid and did not answer when the maid said: 'Well, what are you looking at?' She could not tell her.

It took a year for her to tell the story, which was doubted word by word by her mother and denied by her uncle. But Vandamm knew something was wrong, because Gloria suddenly did not like him or anything he bought her or did for her. He thought it had something to do with her age. She was twelve years old, and she might be having her menstruation earlier than most girls. Lot of reasons. She was moody. A little depressed always. You couldn't expect her to be a child all the time, though. But the story did come out, little by little, until mother and uncle were able to reconstruct the scene. They took Gloria to their doctor, but Gloria would not let him touch her. They had to take her to a woman physician. Vandamm hired a private detective to look up Boam, and instituted his own campaign to have Boam ousted from his job in Washington. This was not necessary. Boam had gone back to Washington after his maltreatment of the child, quit his job, and left no forwarding address. The private detective ascertained that Boam had got into another similar mess a year or two before the war. His daughter's fiancé found out about it and daughter and fiancé eloped and never saw her father. That was the reason he never went to see his daughter in Trenton.

There was no physical aftermath to the Boam incident, except that her mental state affected Gloria's general health. Vandamm thought it would be a good thing to move away from Pittsburgh. A change of scene. New York.

For three years New York turned out to be a good idea. They put Gloria in a High Church day school where the girls wore uniforms. Thus from the first day she was like all the other girls. Her mother took her to school every day and met her after school. Here Gloria was not the prettiest nor the brightest, and was singled out for no special attention. She made a few friends, and

in the summer she went with these friends to a camp in Maine, which was run by two members of the school faculty. There were enough girls at the camp from other schools to keep her from getting tired of the same faces. Then back at school there were always new girls. She improved to such an extent that it was she who asked to be sent away to school. She wanted to go to school in California, but when it came down to giving reasons her only reason was that she loved a tune, 'Orange Grove in California', which was popular at the time. At that her uncle almost indulged this fancy, and would have had it not been for the — he trusted — momentarily depleted state of their finances. He tried to get a job in California, and found out for the first time that he was a lucky man; good men were working out there for monthly salaries smaller than the rent of his apartment in New York. And whatever chance there was of Gloria's being sent to California or anywhere west of the Hudson disappeared when two crimes of violence occurred within a week of each other, solidifying for all time Vandamm's inherent prejudice against the west. One crime was the Leopold-Loeb affair, which was too close a reminder of what had happened to Gloria; and the other was the suicide-pact of the woman and the doctor Vandamm had known long ago. A good, not spectacularly fashionable New England school was decided upon for Gloria. She was there almost the whole year before another man, who eventually made Boam seem like a guardian angel, was attracted to her.

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When you are a year away from a day that (because of ~~some~~ Thing) was not like other days you are as far away from the day and as far away from the thing, good or bad, as you will ever get. If it is bad, it is far enough away. Its effect may last, but there is no use kidding yourself that you live the thing over again. ~~Something~~ something is missing. One thing that is missing in living it is ~~reality~~ reality is the reality; you know when you start that what you are ~~about~~ recall is only, so far as this moment is concerned, a ~~kind of~~ thing. If a year ago you saw yourself cut open, your blood ~~coming~~ out of you, and everything outside was pain coming in you — you still cannot live that over again. Not the day, and not the ~~moment~~ moment. You can and do live back to the moment when the ~~thing~~ whatever it was, began. Or the good thing, ~~but not the day~~

not made up of many good things; at least we don't make milestones out of the good things as much as we do the bad). The still beautiful word poignant does not apply to ice cream, medals you won in school, a ride on a roller coaster, something handsome to wear, or 'The Star-Spangled Banner'; although 'The Star-Spangled Banner' comes closest. It is music, and poor old music, whether it's Bach or Carmichael, it knows when it starts that it is making a forlorn effort to create or recapture something that it of itself does not possess. Music is synthetic; so how can poor, lovely old music, which is the highest art, have by itself a fraction of the poignancy of an important day, an important event that day, in the life of a human being? The answer is it can't. You may shut your eyes for a second while the Maestro is conducting, but you will open them again, and to show how completely wrong you are in thinking that you have been listening to the music he brings out, you will catch yourself noticing that he has shifted the baton from his tired rheumatic right arm to his left. It is nothing to apologize for, however. Only a phony would say that he does not really notice the man Toscanini, but a phony would say it. A phony would think he gained by saying he could overlook the genius because he is a man, a human being. Who the hell wrote the music? A disembodied wraith?

We have had long and uncomfortable periods when we built chairs, forgetting that a chair is meant to be sat in. Music, too, is to be enjoyed, and we might as well face it: it must have human associations if it is to be enjoyed. The same way with love. It can happen to be pure when for one reason or more two people do not go to bed together; and sometimes it is enough, and better, that they do not go to bed together. Love *can* be as far away from the idea of going to bed together as hate is from the idea of killing. But a chair is meant to be sat in, music is good for what it does to you, love is sleeping together, hate is wanting to kill. . . .

Three years can pass, and for two of them Gloria can be safely away from the ability to live again the time with Major Boam. This is not to say that Boam did her a favour. He was bad for her because he made her different, inside herself, and made her have a secret that was too big for her but was not the kind she could share. But she got bigger and stronger, not in the metaphorical sense, and what she knew - that a man as big as Major Boam, a

man that you didn't even know what he looked like undressed, wanted to do the same things to you that little boys did - became final knowledge. It became knowledge that made up for your lack of curiosity, or your willingness to learn. Out of fear you did not want to find out too much when you were thirteen and fourteen, but you could always tell yourself that you knew quite a lot, something the other girls did not know.

The other girls respected Gloria for what they thought was genuine innocence. Children do respect that. All it was was that she did not want to hear talk, to ask questions, to contribute information. But it passed for true innocence. It deceived her mother as well as her contemporaries. When Mrs Wandrous had to tell Gloria what was going on inside her body she felt two ways about it: one was that it was partly an old story to a girl who had been 'violated' by a grown man; the other was that it was awful to have to remind the child that she had a sex. But she told her, and Gloria took the information casually (there was little enough information in what her mother told her) and without questions. Mrs Wandrous breathed with relief and hiked Gloria off to boarding school.

Coming down from school for the Spring vacation Gloria was with five other girls. It was a bad train and the day was not warm, and every time the train stopped a man who was sitting in a seat that was almost surrounded by the six girls would get up and close the door after the passengers who left the door open. After closing the door he would go back to his seat, the third away from the door, and begin to doze. All her life the sound of snoring fascinated and amused Gloria, and this man snored. It made her like this man, and at the next station-stop she got up and closed the door, as she was one seat nearer the door than he was. He smiled and nodded several times, and said thank-you. At Grand Central when her mother met her the man, carrying a brief-case and handbag, went to Mrs Wandrous, who greeted Gloria first off the train, and said: 'I want to compliment you on your little girl's manners and consideration. A very polite and well-mannered little girl,' he smiled and went away. Mrs Wandrous wanted to know who he was - he was either a clergyman or schoolteacher, she knew that, and thought he must be from Gloria's school. Gloria said she guessed she knew why he had said that, and told

her mother. Her mother looked at the man, walking up the ramp, but her instinctive alarm did not last. 'There are good people in the world,' she told herself. It was easy for her to think thus; Gloria's manners were the personal pride and joy of her mother.

On the way back after the holiday Gloria was with one other girl, but they did not get seats together. She was displeased with the prospect of not talking to anyone all the way back, and very pleased when a man's voice said: 'We won't have to worry about the door in this nice weather.' It was the man who had snored. He asked her where she was going to school, said he knew two or three girls there, told her who they were, asked her what her studies were, asked her how she liked teachers in general, explained he was one himself if you could call a principal a teacher.

Not altogether by accident he was on the train that brought her back to New York at the end of school. She was with a lot of her friends but she saw him and spoke to him like an old friend. This time in Grand Central her mother was late, and he was lagging behind. She told her friend she would wait for her mother, and the man when he saw she was alone went to her and said he would see that she got a taxi. He could even give her a lift.

It was all too easy. Two days later she called at his hotel in the afternoon, and she was sent upstairs with a bellboy because the man had been a steady patron of the hotel, was known as a respectable schoolteacher, and probably was expecting her but forgot to say so. Within a month he had her sniffing ether and loving it. It, and everything that went on in that room.

She did not see him as often as she wanted to; they could be together only in New York. She stayed two more years in that school but did not finish her college preparatory course there. In May of the second year the house mistress found a bottle of gin in Gloria's room, and she was 'asked not to come back'. Her mother worried a little about this but attributed it to the fact that Gloria was getting to be very popular with boys, and deep down she was glad; she thought it indicated that the Boom business was a thing of the past. Gloria was immensely popular with boys, and in a less strict school she could have been intercollegiate prom-trotting champion. She went to another school, passed her College Boards for Smith, and then thought better of college. She wanted to study Art. In New York. With her own apartment.

Her uncle enjoyed her popularity because it was the easiest thing for him to do. He never had forgiven himself for bringing Boam into their home, but neither had he ever completely blamed himself. Gloria's current popularity made up for that, and Vandamm was liberal and always on her side in disputes between his sister and his niece.

Neither Mrs Wandrous nor Vandamm was getting any younger. Gloria won out on her refusal to go to college and on studying art in New York. They said they would see about the apartment. For the present they would move to a house in the Village which was theirs by inheritance, and fix up the top floor as a studio. Vandamm was trading luckily in the market at that time and he seriously thought Gloria had a real talent. She did have a kind of facility; she could copy caricatures by Hugo Gellert, William Auerbach-Levy, Covarrubias, Constantin Alajálov, Ralph Barton - any of the better-known caricaturists. That year she talked a great deal about going to the Art Students' League, but each time a new class would form she would forget to sign up, and so she went on copying caricatures when she had nothing else to do, and she also did some posing, always in the nude. But the thing that about that time became and continued for two or three years to be the most important was drinking. She became one of the world's heaviest drinkers between 1927 and 1930, when the world saw some pretty heavy drinking. The Dizzy Club, the Hotsy-Totsy, Tommy Guinan's Chez Florence, the Type & Print Club, the Basque's, Michel's, Tony's East Fifty-third Street, Tony's West Forty-ninth Street, Forty-two West Forty-nine, the Aquarium, Mario's, the Clamhouse, the Bandbox, the West Forty-fourth Street Club, McDermott's, the Sligo Slasher's, the Newswriters', Billy Duffy's, Jack Delaney's, Sam Schwartz's, the Richmond, Frank & Jack's, Frankie & Johnny's, Felix's, Louis', Phyllis's, Twenty-one West Fifty-third, Marlborough House - these were places where she was known by name and sight, where she awed the bartenders by the amount she drank. They knew that before closing she would be stewed, but not without a good fight. There was no thought of going on the wagon. There was no reason to go on the wagon. She drank rye and water all day long. When she remembered that she had not eaten for twenty-four hours she would go to a place where the eggs were to be trusted, order a raw

egg, break it in an Old Fashioned cocktail tumbler, shoot Angostura bitters into it, and gulp the result. That night she would have dinner: fried fillet of sole with tartar sauce. Next day, maybe no food, maybe bouillon with a raw egg. Certain cigarettes gave her a headache. She would smoke Chesterfields or Herbert Tareytons, no others. For days at a time she would have no sex life, tying up with a group of young Yale remittance men who in their early twenties were sufficiently advanced alcoholics to make it desirable to their families that they stay in New York. It was understood and agreed that the big thing in life was liquor, and while she was with these young men she believed and they believed that she was - well, like a sister. You did not bother her. Only one disgusting little fat boy, who came on from the Middle West twice a year, ever did bother her, but he stopped when he saw it was not the thing to do. The other young men were in the stock market from noon to closing, by telephone. By three-thirty they knew how they stood: whether to celebrate at Texas Guinan's or to drown their sorrows every other place. There was considerable riding around in automobiles with non-New York licence plates, but the tars seldom got out of the state except during football season. The summers were fun in New York. Planters' Punches. Mint Juleps. Tom Collinses. Riqueys. You had two or three of these to usher in the season, and paid a visit or two to the beer places, and then you went back to whiskey and water. What was the use of kidding yourself? Everything was done at a moment's notice. If you wanted to go to a night club to hear Helen Morgan or Libby Holman you made the decision at midnight, you scattered to dress, met an hour later, bought a couple of bottles, and so to the night club. The theatre was out. The movies, a little. Private parties, no, unless they were something special. Weddings, by all means. The young men were happiest when they could arrive at '42', stewed and in cutaways, 'glad to be back with decent people, not these people that think champagne is something to drink.'

'Down with Princeton!' Gloria would say.

'Down with Princeton,' the young men would say.

'To hell with Harvard!' Gloria would say.

'The hell with Harvard,' the young men would say.

'Hurrray for our side!'

'Hurrray for our side.'

'Bing-go, bing-go, bingo, bingo, bingo that's the ling-go.' Gloria would sing, and the young men would smile and join in a little weakly, drinking very hard until they could get like her, except that she could do these things while apparently not drunk. She was not invited to the weddings that they were ushering at, and there were times when she was not exactly a pest, but if she would only understand that a telephone call to a broker was important. On wedding days she would be waiting for them when they finally got away from the sailing of the French ships that in those days were well liked, but when they met her she would have a bill for drinks waiting for them that indicated she had been waiting too - since lunch. Not that she was poor. She always had fifteen or twenty dollars for taxis and things, and if you ran short, she would hand it right over. It was just that she was unthinking.

She used to see Weston Liggett sometimes. He would come in, sometimes alone, sometimes with a man, sometimes with women. He would stand at the bar, have his drinks, and behave himself. The second or third time she saw him she noticed he was looking at her longer than it was wise to do even in the best-regulated speak-easies. 'Who is that man you spoke to?' she said to the Yale boy.

'Oh, a fellow called Liggett. He was in college with my brother.' 'Yale?'

'Uh-huh. Yeah. He was one of the atha-letic boys. Crew.'

It meant that he could never pick her up, and she would never speak to him until they were properly introduced. He could see her every day of the year after that, but because they had connexions in common she would not have anything to do with him; and Liggett understood that and soon became a strange familiar face that Gloria saw unrecognizingly even when she was alone and he was alone. She might never have spoken to him had it not been for one accident: she got pregnant.

One night in the winter of 1929-30 she went home with the surviving two Yale boys. The others had gone back to the provinces to wait out the crash, but these two remained. This night they were prematurely drunk; the liquor was beginning to be harder to take. Gloria usually got undressed in the bathroom when she stayed at their apartment, and they would lend her pyjamas. Up to that point this night was as always. But when she lay down on the sofa Bill said: 'Come on over and sleep with me.'

'All right,' she said.

She picked up her pillow and dragged her comforter after her and got into bed with him. She turned her back and settled herself but she knew immediately that Bill was not going to be pal Bill tonight. He was holding her too close for any doubt about that. She let him worry for a few minutes, and then she turned around and put her arms around him and kissed him. After all, they had been friends a long time, and she liked Bill.

She also liked Mike, who was in the other bed, and not missing a thing. 'How about me, Gloria?' he said.

'All right,' she said.

Then they called up another girl, or rather Gloria did. The girls they called would not come over at that hour, but Gloria knew one who would, so long as there was another girl. It was all a lot more than the Yale boys anticipated, and it put an end to the drinking companionship. After that night, which was not unpleasant, Gloria went into another phase of her life; although it was in a way a return to a former phase. The next day, when she and Jane left the boys' apartment, Gloria went with Jane to a date Jane had, and the man got another man and Gloria never went out with the Yale boys again. She meant to, they meant to, but it was time she was moving on.

It was the summer of that year, 1930, when she met Eddie Brunner. She had gone to the place where he worked with 'the major' because she had met the major in a speakeasy and had the sudden fear that he might be Major Boam and she might not be recognizing him. In all her life she had met only one other major and that was Boam, and it became a terribly important thing to find out if this could be he. What if she had forgotten that man's face? It was the first time she had thought of the possibility of having forgotten Boam's face, and when the thought came she had to admit that she might easily have seen Major Boam on the street without recognizing him. This major turned out not to be Boam, but not immediately. When she asked him his name (it was lost in the mumble of a speakeasy introduction) he told her it didn't make any difference, just call him Major. That was enough to strengthen her fear that it could be Boam without her recognizing him. For the rest of the night she pestered him for his name, and he amiably refused to tell her unless she went to this place

that place with him. His name turned out to be O'Brien or Kelly or some Irish name, but by the time she learned this she had learned too many other things about him.

Many men had the pleasure of sleeping with Gloria in the year 1930, and Eddie was the only one who could have who didn't. He began by being afraid of getting a social disease, and then when Gloria became a friend he thought he saw something in her that he did not want to sleep with. He saw a kid sister. When they were together, going to the movies, having breakfast, having a couple of beers or a highball at his house, he would feel that he was in the presence of the real Gloria. The other part of her life was shut out. They would talk about the things of their childhood (it is always a wonderful thing to discover with someone through memories of childhood how small America is). 'When you were a kid did you count out by saying Ibbity-bibbity-sibbity-sab, ibbity-bibbity-kanah-ba, or did you just say cenie-meenie?'

'We said ibbity-bibbity.'

'When you were a kid did you yell at girls named Marguerite like this: "Marguerite, go wash your feet, the Board of Health's across the street"?''

'No, we never yelled that.'

'Adam and Eve and Pinch-Me went out the river to swim. Adam and Eve were drowned and who was saved?'

'Pinch-Me.' Then: 'Ouch!'

'Did you go to dancing school?'

'Oh, sure.'

'Did your fella used to carry your ballet slippers for you in the fancy bag?'

'I didn't have a fella.'

'Brothers and sisters I have none, but this man's -'

'Oh, God, I could never do those.'

Or long stories beginning: 'Once when I was a kid -' about killing a snake or breaking a finger or almost saving someone's life. They would talk about the stories in *The American Boy*, both of them having been great admirers of Marcus Aurelius Fortunatus Tidd, the stuttering fat boy created by Clarence Budington Kelland; and the Altschuler Indian stories, and the girls of Bradford Hall, and Larry the Bat and Silver Nell - wasn't that her name? In the Jimmie Dale stories? They were for older people, but after

reading them Eddie had gone around sticking grey seals all over the neighbourhood. What kind of car did Gloria have? No car, until she was twelve or something like that, then her uncle bought a Haines, which he traded in on a National. Oh, but those weren't old cars. Eddie's father had a Lozier, an Abbott-Detroit, a Stutz Bearcat (which he smashed up three weeks after he bought it), a Saxon, an Earl, a King Eight - always buying cars. Of course a lot of Fords, a second-hand Owen Magnetic, and an airplane. He won the airplane as a gambling gain, but he was afraid to learn to fly. Had Gloria played Diabolo? Once, and got knocked on the head. Did you ever sell Easter egg dyes to win a motion picture camera? Did you ever know anyone who won a real Shetland pony by selling subscriptions to some magazine? No, but she had saved bread wrappers and won a pushmobile. What were your words for going to the bathroom? Did you ever really know a boy who robbed birds' nests? No, that was like people making bathtub gin. Neither of them ever had seen gin made in a bathtub.

'I love you, Eddie darling,' she would say.

'I love you, Gloria,' he would say, but always wanting to say more than that, like: 'No matter what they say about you,' or 'I wish I'd known you five years sooner,' or 'Why don't you pull yourself together?'

She knew that and it had a sterilizing effect, which was what they wanted, but no good when they had it. 'Eddie,' she would say, to change the subject, 'why don't you go to a dentist? You're going to lose that tooth and it'll spoil your smile. Go to my dentist tomorrow, now will you promise?'

He would take her home, but they knew she would go right out again, and after these happy evenings that always ended with their knowing they had nothing to look forward to, the next man who had her would say to himself: 'Well, I thought I knew everything, but after all the places I've been, all the women, a kid, an American kid. . . .'

Because of the Yale boys she had an abortion, and after that many benders. The night she picked up Weston Liggett for the first time she was coasting along from a bender which had begun after seeing Eddie. She had been home twice during this bender to change her clothes (she long since had had it well understood at home that she did not like to be questioned when she told her

mother that she was staying with a friend uptown). A bad thing about days like that was to come out of a speakeasy in the afternoon and find it still daylight, and she would hurry downtown to fill in the remaining daylight with a bath and a change of clothes. The place where she encountered Liggett was a converted carriage house, with no character except for that. It was patronized by kept women and people in moderately good circumstances who lived in the vicinity. Gloria went there when some people she knew telephoned her and said they were all meeting there instead of another place. She went there – it was about nine-thirty in the evening – and discovered she was alone except for a couple, a sort of military grandfather and a young woman out to take him for whatever could be got out of him. Gloria said to the husky Italian who let her in: 'I'm meeting Mrs Voorhees and her party. I'll wait for her at the bar.' She had a drink and was smoking and in walked Liggett. He sat at the other end of the bar, munching potato chips and drinking Scotch and soda. When he recognized Gloria he picked up his drink and joined her. 'We've never met, but I've seen you so often –'

'Yes, with Billy.'

'I went to college with his brother.'

'Yes, he told me.'

'My name is Liggett.'

'He told me that, too. I'm Gloria Wandrous.' The bartender relaxed then.

'Wandrous. I'll bet people – it's so much like wondrous.'

'Yes, they think I made it up, like Gladys Glad and Hazel Dawn and Leatrice Joy, names like that. I didn't though. It's spelt with an a. W, a, n, d, r, o, u, s, and it's pronounced Wan-drous, pale and wan.'

'Not pale and won.'

'Mm. Not bad. Not *good*, but not bad.'

'Well, I don't make any pretence of being a wit. I'm just a hard-working business man.'

'Oh, are business men working again? I hadn't heard.'

'Well, not as much as we'd like to. What I was leading up to was, I suppose you have a date.'

'You didn't think I came in here every night, the mysterious veiled lady that always sits alone sipping her apéritif?'

'That's exactly what I thought, or hoped. I thought you came here to get away from the usual places -'

'Place, as far as you and I are concerned.'

'Right. But now look here, Miss Wandrous, don't dodge the issue. Here is a hard-working business man with Saturday night as free as the air -'

'As free as the air. I have a friend a writer, he'd like to use that some time. As free as the air. That's good.'

'You won't go places with me, then?'

'Why go places? Isn't this all right?' she said. 'No, Mr —'

'Liggett.'

'Mr Liggett. No, I'm waiting for some people. It'll probably be all right if you join us. You can sit here till they come and I'll introduce you to those I know.'

'Oh, you don't know them. Maybe you won't like them.'

'That's possible — here they are, or at least it sounds like. Hello, there.'

'Gloria darling, you've never been so prompt. Why, Weston Lee-gett. I didn't know you knew each other. Weston, why, you dog, you've broken up my party, but it's all right. That means we have an extra man. See now. Gloria, this is Mr Zoom, and uh, Mr Zoom, and you know Mary and Esther, and, everybody, this is Weston Liggett, a great friend of Peter Voorhees. Didn't you go to school together or something?'

'Prep school. Look, I don't want to mess up your party. I'll — let me buy you a drink, and —'

'There are four more people coming down from my house,' said Mrs Voorhees. 'Elaine and three men, so you really will be an extra man when we all get here. Oh, I wonder what I want to drink. A Stinger, I think. Elaine, if those men knew you were going to be here they wouldn't have waited with Elaine.'

'They knew,' said Gloria.

'Only by name. Isn't she lovely, Weston? She's young enough to be your daughter, Weston. You know that, don't you? You're not pretending otherwise, I hope.'

'I'm going to adopt her,' said Liggett. 'That's what we're here for, a few papers to sign and she's my daughter.'

'What do you want with two more daughters I'd like to know?'

'Is anybody hungry?' said one of the Messrs 'Zoom'. 'I'm gonna order some food. A nice filet mignon.'

'That's not very nice after the dinner we had at my house.'

'Squop chicken? I never get enough to eat when I eat squop chicken. I told you that when we sat down. You gotta give me that. I told you when we sat down, I said frankly I said this is not my idea of a meal, squop chicken. I'm a big eater. Were you in the Army, Mr Liggett?'

'Uh-huh.'

'Then you know how it is. One thing I said to myself in France. I promised myself if I ever got back home the one thing I was never gonna do was go hungry. When I want to eat I eat.'

'Watch this trick,' said Mrs Voorhees. The other Mr was doing a trick. You balance a fifty-cent piece on the rim of a glass with a dollar bill between the coin and the glass. You snatched the dollar bill out from under the coin and - if the trick is successful - the coin remains balanced on the glass. 'Fascinating,' said Mrs V.

'I can do a better one than that with friction. You get friction in your fingers - '

'Shhhhhh. I can't even get it to stay on the glass, let alone make it stay after you pull the bill away. You have a wonderful sense of - I think I do want something to eat, after all. Waiter, have you any uh, that uh, you know, begins with a Z? It's a dessert.'

'Zabag - '

'That's it. I'll have some. Nothing for you, Mary?'

'I know one with friction. You get friction in your fingers by rubbing them on the table-cloth. Wait till he puts the table-cloth on the table and I'll show you. And you have to have a fork or a spoon. That's the idea of it. You lift up the spoon with the - '

'Listen, Hoover's all right.'

'Will you look at that old fool. Can't he see she's making a fool out of him? I'm glad my father died before he was old enough - '

'I'm sorry, Madame, the chef says - '

'Look at him. Does he get any thrill out of that?'

'It's exactly like the old place. Exactly. The only difference is it's on the uptown side now instead of the downtown side. It used to be on the downtown side but *now* it's on the *uptown*. I think they were terribly smart to preserve the same atmosphere. I said - - '

'Did you see that thing they had in the *New Yorker* I think it was the week before last?'

Listening, Gloria and Liggett found themselves holding hands. On her part a tenderness had come over her; at first because she felt responsible for Liggett, and then because she liked him; he was better than these other people. 'When the others come we can leave, if you want to,' she said.

'Good. Perfect,' said Liggett. 'Will it be all right with -'

'She won't mind. She just hates to be alone. Two people more or less won't make any difference.'

'Good. We'll go some place and dance. I haven't done any volunteer dancing for a long time. That's a compliment, I hope you appreciate it. I haven't done any volunteer dancing since I don't know when. Of course I dance the Turkey Trot. You do the Turkey Trot, of course?'

'Mm-hmm. And the Bunny Hug. And the Maxixe. And the Can-Can. By the way, what was the Can-Can? Was it worth all the excitement they made about it, or that I suppose they made about it?'

'Listen, beautiful Miss Wandrous, I am *not* old enough to remember the Can-Can. The Can-Can was popular around the turn of the century, and I wasn't. I wasn't at all popular at the turn of the century.'

'I can hardly believe that. At least I can hardly believe my ears now, hearing you admit that you weren't popular any time in your life.'

'There have been lots of times when I wasn't popular, and I'm beginning to think this is one of those times.'

They went to a lot of speakasies, especially to the then new kind, as it was the beginning of the elaborate era. From serving furtive drinks of bad liquor disguised as demi-tasse the speakeasy had progressed to whole town houses, with uniformed pages and cigarette girls, a string orchestra and a four- or five-piece Negro band for dancing, free *hors d'œuvres*, four and five bartenders, silver-plated keys and other souvenir-admittance tokens to regular patrons, expensive entertainment, Cordon Bleu chefs, engraved announcements in pretty good taste, intricate accounting systems and business machinery - all a very good and, because of the competition, necessary front for the picturesque and deadly business

of supplying liquor at huge financial profit - powerful radio stations, powerful speedboats and other craft not unlike the British 'Q' ships, powerful weapons against hijackers, powerful connexions in the right places. And often very good liquor and enough good wine to set in front of the people who knew good wine and still cared about it.

Having got thoroughly drunk, picking up couples and dropping them, joining parties and deserting them. Gloria and Liggett went to his apartment as the last place to go. He had been wondering all night how he was going to suggest a hotel. He thought it over and thought it over, and kept putting it off. At the last place they went to, which they closed up, they took a taxi, Liggett gave his home address, and it was as easy as that. When Gloria heard the address she guessed it was no love nest she was going to, and when she saw the apartment she knew it wasn't.

Chapter 5

On Monday afternoon an unidentified man jumped in front of a New Lots express in the Fourteenth Street subway station. Mr Hoover was on time for the usual meeting of his Cabinet. Robert McDermott, a student at Fordham University, was complimented for his talk on the Blessed Virgin at the morning exercises in Her honour. A woman named Plotkin, living in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn, decided to leave her husband for good and all. William K. Fenstermacher, the East 149th Street repair man, went all the way to Tremont Avenue to fix a radio for a Mrs Jones, but there was no Jones at the address given, so he had to go all the way back to the shop, wasting over an hour and a half. Babe Ruth hit a home run into the bleachers near the right field foul line. Grayce Johnson tried to get a job in the chorus of The Band Wagon, a new revue, but was told the show was already in rehearsal. Patrolman John J. Barry, Shield No. 17858, was still on sick call as a result of being kicked in the groin by a young woman Communist in the Union Square demonstration of the preceding Friday. Jerry, a drunk, did not wake up once during the entire

afternoon, which he spent in a chair at a West 49th Street speak-easy. Identical twins were delivered to a Mrs Lachase at the Lying-In Hospital. A Studebaker sedan bumped the spare tyre of a Ford coupé at Broadway and Canal Street, and the man driving the Ford punched the Studebaker driver in the mouth. Both men were arrested. Joseph H. Dilwyn, forty-two years old, had all his teeth out by the same dentist he had gone to for twelve years. A woman who shall be nameless took the money her husband had given her to pay the electric light bill and bought one of the new Eugenic hats with it. Harry W. Blossom, visiting New York for the first time since the War, fell asleep in the Strand Theatre and missed half the picture. At 3.16 p.m. Mr Francis F. Tearney, conductor on a Jackson Heights No 15 Fifth Avenue bus, tipped his cap at St Patrick's Cathedral. James J. Walker, mayor of the City of New York, had a late lunch at the Hardware Club. A girl using an old curling iron caused a short circuit in the Pan-Hellenic Club. An unidentified man jumped in front of a Bronx Park express in the Mott Avenue subway station. After trying for three days Miss Helen Tate, a typist employed by the New York Life, was able to recall the name of a young man she had met two summers before at a party in Red Bank, N.J. Mr and Mrs Harvey L. Fox celebrated their thirtieth wedding anniversary with a luncheon in the Hotel Bossert, Brooklyn. Al Astor, an actor at liberty, woke up thinking it was Tuesday. John Lee, a coloured boy, pulled the wings out of a fly in Public School 108. The Caswell Realty Company sold a row of taxpayers in Lexington Avenue to Jack W. Levine for a sum in the neighbourhood of \$125,000. Gloria Wandrous, after taking a warm bath at home, went to sleep while worrying over what she should do about Mrs Liggett's mink coat. Eddie Brunner spent the afternoon at Norma Day's apartment playing the phonograph, especially 'The Wind in the Willows' the Rudy Vallée record.

Monday afternoon Emily Liggett and her daughters came home by train. They got out of their taxi, carrying their coats and leaving the few bags for the doorman to see to. Emily went straight to her room and of all the things that happened to all the people in New York that day, none was more shocking to any individual than Emily's discovery that her mink coat was not in her closet.

It had been such a good week-end; quiet and peaceful. Saturday was warm, Sunday morning was warm and in the afternoon it turned cool and made Emily think of the coat. It was time, really, to put it away, and she made a note of it as the first thing to do Tuesday morning. This year she would insure it for \$3,000, half what it cost in 1928. She would insure it and hope something would happen to it so that she could get the money out of it. There were things she could do with \$3,000, and she was getting tired of having a mink coat. She never had been happy with the actual possession of it. Something about the New England conscience; when you added up the maximum number of times you wore the coat in a season, multiplied that by three for three seasons, and divided that into \$6,000 you got the cost of the coat each time you had worn it. And it was too much. It was a fair calculation because she knew she could not get \$3,000 for the coat now in any other way than insurance. As for getting \$6,000 on it - ~~nothing~~. Well, it had been a good week-end.

She opened the closet door, and the closet might as well have been empty. The coat was not there. She called the maid and the maid and questioned them, but her questioning and her own and their search did not result in finding the coat. Her questioning did not bring about any of the disclosures which the maid was pondering - the inference the maid had ~~drawn from some~~ little things she had noticed about Mr Liggett's bathroom and bath.

Emily telephoned Liggett, but he was not in the office. His secretary did not expect him back. Emily was going to join two clubs and a speakeasy or two, because she thought the loss of the coat ought to be reported immediately. But she would wait and talk to Weston before notifying the police. When Weston came home she told him about the coat. He was ~~disgusted~~ was twice frightened, because he did not know where it was when he learned it had disappeared. He told Emily it was best not to report it. He told Emily it was best not to report it that were immediately reported. He told Emily it was best not to report it that it was a bad thing to have. 'All the insurance companies keep a sort of exchange list of companies know about it.'

the companies. It makes you a bad risk to lose a thing like that, and when you're a bad risk it's sometimes impossible to get insurance, and the least you get out of it is you have to pay a much higher premium, not only on, for instance, the coat, if they get it back, but also anything else you decide to insure.' Liggett did not believe all this - in fact knew some of it to be inaccurate; but it covered up his confusion. That that girl, that swell kid, could be the same girl he had slept with last night, for whom he was feeling something he never had felt before, and all the time she was a common ordinary little thief - it was beyond him. It was more than beyond him. The more he thought of it the angrier he got, until he wanted to take her by the throat. He told Emily he would have a private detective agency look for the coat before reporting to the insurance company or the police. This was not the way Emily would have done it, and she said so. Why go to the expense of a private detective agency when the insurance company assumed that and would be glad to assume it rather than risk the loss of \$3,000 for the coat? No, no, he insisted. Hadn't she been listening to him? Didn't she pay any attention? Hadn't he just finished telling her that the insurance company kept blacklists, and the chances were the disappearance of the coat would have some simple explanation. The detective agency wouldn't charge much - ten dollars, probably. And he would save that much in premiums by not reporting the loss to the insurance company. 'Now please let me handle this,' he told Emily. Well, it seemed pretty irregular to her, and she didn't like it. What if the private detectives didn't find the coat? Wouldn't the insurance company be very annoyed when he did finally report the theft of the coat? Wouldn't they ask why he hadn't immediately reported to the police? Wouldn't it be better in the long run to do the regular thing? She thought it was always best to do the regular thing, the conventional thing. When someone dies, you get an undertaker; when something is stolen, you tell the police. Liggett almost said: 'Who are you talking about the conventional thing? You slept with me before you married me.' He was ashamed of that, of thinking it; but he guessed he always had thought it. It was just beginning to dawn on him that he never had loved Emily. He was so flattered by what she felt for him before they were married that he had been blinded to his true feeling about her. His true feeling was passion

and that had gone, and since then there had been nothing but the habit of marriage – he really loved Gloria.

And then he remembered that he did not love Gloria. He could not love a common thief. She *was* a common thief, too. You could see that in her face. There was something in her face, some unconventional thing along with the rest of her beauty, her mouth and eyes and nose – somewhere around the eyes, perhaps, or was it the mouth? – she did not have the conventional look. Emily, yes. Emily had it. He could look at Emily dispassionately, impersonally, as though he did not know her – objectively? wasn't it called? He could look at her and see how much she looked like dozens of girls who had been born and brought up as she had been. You saw them at the theatre, at the best cabarets and speakeasies, at the good clubs on Long Island – and then you saw the same girls, the same women, dressed the same, differing only in the accent of their speech, at clubs in other cities, at horse shows and football games and dances, at Junior League conventions. Emily, he decided after eighteen years of marriage, was a type. And he knew why she was a type, or he knew the thing that made the difference in the look of a girl like Emily and the look of a girl like Gloria. Gloria led a certain kind of life, a sordid life; drinking and sleeping with men and God knows what all, and she had seen more of 'life' than Emily ever possibly would see. Whereas Emily had been brought up a certain way, always accustomed to money and the good ways of spending it. In other words, all her life Emily had been looking at nice things, nice houses, cars, pictures, grounds, clothes, people. Things that were easy to look at, and people that were easy to look at; with healthy complexions and good teeth, people who had had pasteurized milk to drink and proper food all their lives from the time they were infants; people who lived in houses that were kept clean, and painted when paint was needed, who took care of their cars and their furniture and their bodies, and by so doing their minds were taken care of; and they got the look that Emily and girls – women – like her had. Whereas Gloria – well, take for instance the people she was with the night he saw her two nights ago, the first night he went out with her. The man that liked to cat, for instance. Where did he come from? He might have come from the Ghetto. Liggett happened to know that there were places in the slums where eighty families would use the same outside

toilet. A little thing, but imagine what it must look like! Imagine having spent your formative years living like, well, somewhat the way you lived in the Army. Imagine what effect that would have on your mind. And of course a thing like that didn't only affect your mind; it showed in your face, absolutely. Not that it was so obvious in Gloria's case. She had good teeth and a good complexion and a healthy body, but there was something wrong somewhere. She had not gone to the very best schools, for instance. A little thing perhaps, but important. Her family — he didn't know anything about them; just that she lived with her mother and her mother's brother. Maybe she was a bastard. That was possible. She could be a bastard. That can happen in this country. Maybe her mother never was married. Sure, that could happen in this country. He never heard of it except among poor people, and Gloria's family were not poor. But why couldn't it happen in this country? The first time he and Emily ever stayed together they took a chance on having children, and in those days people didn't know as much about not getting caught as they do today. Gloria was even older than Ruth, so maybe her mother had done just what Emily had done, with no luck. Maybe Gloria's father was killed in a railroad accident or something, intending to marry Gloria's mother, but on the night he first stayed with her, maybe on his way home he was killed by an automobile or a hold-up man or something. It could happen. There was a fellow at New Haven that was very mysterious about his family. His mother was on the stage, and nothing was ever said about his father. Liggett wished now that he had known the fellow better. Now he couldn't remember the fellow's name, but some of the fellows in Liggett's crowd had wondered about this What's-His-Name. He drew for the *Record*. An artist. Well, bastards were always talented people. Some of the most famous people in history were bastards. Not bastards in any derogatory sense of the word, but love children. (How awful to be a love child. It'd be better to be a bastard. 'If I were a bastard I'd rather be called a bastard than a love child.') Now Gloria, she drew or painted. She was interested in art. And she certainly knew a lot of funny people. She knew that bunch of kids from New Haven, young Billy and those kids. But anybody could meet them, and anybody could meet Gloria. God damn it! That was the worst of it. Anybody could meet Gloria. He thought that all through

dinner, looking at his wife, his two daughters, seeing in their faces the thing he had been thinking about a proper upbringing and looking at nice things and what it does to your face. He saw them and he thought of Gloria, and that anybody could meet Gloria, and Anybody, somebody she picked up in a speakeasy somewhere probably was with her now, this minute.

'I don't think I'll wait for dessert,' he said.

'Strawberries? You won't wait for strawberries?' said Emily.

'Oh, good. Strawberries,' said Ruth. 'Daddy, you'll surely wait for strawberries. If you go I'll have to eat yours and I'll get strawberry rash.'

'You won't *have* to,' said Emily.

'Gotta go. I just thought of a fellow. About the coat.'

'Can't you phone him? A detective agency, surely they'd have a phone.'

'No. Not this fellow. He isn't a private detective. He's a regular city detective, and if I phoned him he'd have to make a report on it. If I went through the regular channels. I'll get in touch with him through a friend of mine, Casey, down at Tammany Hall.'

'Well, where? Can't you phone this Casey and make an appointment?'

'Emily, *must* I explain everything in detail? I just thought of something and I want to do it now. I don't want any strawberries, or if they're that good you can put them in the icebox till I get back.'

'Well, all right. I hope this doesn't mean one of your all-night binges with your Tammany Hall friends.'

If the girls had not been there he would have given a more blistering answer than: 'I should have been a doctor.'

A taxi took him to a drug store in the Grand Central zone and he tried to get Gloria on the telephone. He tried her home, several speakeasies, and - he did not quite know why - had her paged at two of the Times Square hotels. A woman he guessed was her mother said Gloria was out for dinner and the evening. It sounded so respectable, the voice and the words, that he wanted to laugh in the mouthpiece. He could not tell (and he tried whether he was now angry with Gloria for stealing Emily's coat, or because he had her, in his mind, grappling with some young snooty from Princeton. He came out of the telephone booth sweating and uncomfortable, with his hat on the back of his head.

standing up at the fountain, and when he set the glass down on the fountain it made the hollow *cloup* sound those glasses make, but this glass must have been imperfect because it cracked and broke and he cut his finger, ever so slightly, but enough to cause an industrial crisis in the store. The pharmacist and the soda jerker were so solicitous and made him so angry with it that he was rude to them, and away went his resolution not to drink. He had been feeling so respectable and superior up to then, but the cut on his finger, which was minutely painful but enormously annoying, and the store people with their attentions got him upset. 'Jesus Christ why don't you send for a God damn ambulance,' he said, and went out in search of a drink.

Fifty-second Street between Fifth and Sixth Avenues was packed solid with automobiles and their sound, never changing. The *cep* sound of the taxis and the *aa-oo-aa* of Lincoln town cars predominated in the chorus. It was like an evening wedding in a small town; with the invited, those who had cards, inside, and the big noise going outside independent of the rest.

He went inside and had a Scotch and soda at the bar. It appeared to be full of people trying to be late for the theatre, and out-of-town men in light tan suits, drinking Old Fashioneds and laughing too loud for the humour in anything they could possibly say. Liggett did not want to talk to anyone, not even the bartenders. He drank and smoked and drank and smoked, and when his cigarette was done he ate potato chips and when his drink was done he lit another cigarette and then had more to drink. This way he waited out the people who were going to the theatre, and was alone at the bar. By that time the men in the tan suits were kissing the handsome women. Those men were getting drunk much too soon, Liggett decided, getting drunk. He realized he was drinking too much and he put it up to himself squarclly, whether to go home now or get really stewed. He decided to get stewed because he would be uncomfortable if he went home, where he never got drunk; and because if he got drunk here he might think of some crazy thing to do that might lead to his finding Gloria. Where could she be? New York's a big place, but the places Gloria went to were not many. The theatre was out; she never went to the theatre. The only other place she could be was in any apartment house. Any other from the houses that hung over the

Harlem River branch of the New York Central to the apartments that hung over the East River, or in a one-room apartment in the Village, or an artist's studio in the West Sixties, or some place on Riverside Drive. Any apartment.

He went home late, having gone to nine speakeasies in one block, having been refused admission to two others. He went home without seeing Gloria.

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She was spending the evening with Eddie. She went to his apartment and they had dinner at a restaurant, where Eddie ate a lot of spaghetti, winding it expertly around his fork. They had a bottle of red wine. It was a good little restaurant, with sawdust on the floor and a pool table, where some elderly Italians played a game which Eddie never understood; something to do with shooting the cueball between two tiny bowling pins. A small radio was turned on. They did not change the dial, and the programme went from music to speech to adventure story to torch-singer, with no editing on the part of the proprietor of the place. It was probably the only station that came in good, because of the 'L', which was only half a block away. Gloria and Eddie were the only Americans in the place, and no one paid any attention to them. When they wanted the waiter they had to call him from his card game with three other patrons.

'What did you do last night?' said Eddie.

'Oh, went to a movie.'

'Which one?' Eddie asked.

'The Strand.'

'What did you see?'

'Uh, Norma Shearer, in "Strangers May Kiss".'

'Oh, did you? How'd you like it? Any good?'

'Not very. I like her, though. I think she's terribly attractive.'

'She's a Canadian. From Montreal. You know, Montreal, Nova Scotia,' said Eddie.

'Montreal isn't in Nova Scotia,' said Gloria.

'I know. And "Strangers May Kiss" isn't at the Strand, in case you're interested. Of course I'm not. I don't give a damn, only I don't know why you think you have to lie to me.'

'Well, I could have got the theatre wrong.'

'No, you couldn't. You could have got the theatre wrong, but not the picture, and "Strangers May Kiss" isn't playing on Broadway. It was, but it isn't now. So don't lie any more than you have to.'

'I'll lie to you if I want to. What I do isn't your affair anyway.'

'You won't lie to me often, because I won't be around to listen.'

'Why? Are you going away?'

'No. Where would I go? No, it's just that I won't see you. I don't want to see you if you lie to me. I know practically everything about you that there is to know, and I don't mind the kind of life you lead, because that's your business. But just don't go to all the trouble of lying to me. Save your lies for someone you have to lie to.'

'Oh -'

He laughed. 'Unless of course you want to *practise* on me. You ought to do a little more practising, by the way. If you think Norma believed that story the other night about you and your imaginary cousin and the crap game where you lost your clothes. What do you think people are? Don't you give them credit for any sense at all? You know it's a form of insult, making up a screwy story to explain something that you don't have to explain. You know, Norma's my girl, and she hasn't any wrong ideas about us.'

'Did you tell her?'

'Certainly I told her.'

'How? What did you say to her?'

'I told her we weren't having an affair.'

'Who brought it up? Did you say it first, or did she ask you? How did you happen to tell her?'

'I don't know,' said Eddie, and reflected. 'It was when I first knew her. She asked me if I was in love with anybody, and I said no, and she said what about the girl named Gloria that someone said I saw all the time. Someone told her I was seeing you, but all she knew was your first name. So I said you were a platonic friend, and that's all.'

'Is it?'

'About all. Nothing else worth repeating.'

'Didn't she say that if you and I were platonic friends, you were my only platonic friend?'

'No. Not exactly.'

'Not exactly, huh? You know she said something like that, though, don't you?'

'A little like that. Oh, what the hell, Gloria, yes, she didn't put it that way. She wanted to know how I could see a good-looking girl like you and keep up a platonic friendship. I mean keep it platonic.'

'And you were peeved because you thought she was laughing at you. It didn't make you look so good to be the one man I didn't sleep with.'

'There you're wrong. If I started to resent that now it'd be pretty late in the game.'

'Did you ever resent it?'

'No.'

'Why not?'

'I don't know.'

'Because I'm not attractive to you?'

'No. Not that either.'

'Well then, *what?*'

'Well, we didn't start off that way, is the only reason I can give right now. Do you want a psychological reason?'

'Yes.'

'Well, I haven't got one for you. Do you want some more wine?'

'Yes, I guess I ought to have some wine from sour grapes.'

'Oh, for God's sake,' said Eddie. 'Am I supposed to infer that you're sour grapes because I like Norma better than you?'

'Why not? Isn't that the truth?'

'No, certainly not.'

'You don't like me because you feel superior. You know all about me and that's why you never ask me to sleep with you.'

'I've asked you to sleep with me.'

'Yes. Sleep with you. Good Samaritan. When I'm tight and you think I'll get the devil if I go home drunk. You ask me if I'll sleep in your apartment. Why, that's the most insulting thing you can do, in a way. It *proves* how you feel about me. You're above my sex appeal. You could sleep with me and not feel a thing.'

'Good Lord.'

'Yes, good Lord. I'm no good. I'm not fit to touch. You'd be

'I am, yes. He isn't. I know what he thinks. He thinks - well, just a pushover. First night I go out with him I go to bed with him. Even worse than that. He picked me up in a speakeasy.'

'Well, being picked up in a speakeasy is better than being picked up in the Grand Central station.'

'Why did you say that! Answer me! Why did you say that?'

'Hell's bells, I don't know. Did I say the wrong thing?'

'What made you say the Grand Central station? What do you know about the Grand Central station?'

'Well - it's - a station.'

'You said it was better to be picked up in a speakeasy than in Grand Central. Why did you say that? Do you know anything about my being picked up in the Grand Central?'

'No, were you?'

'Oh, God. Oh, Eddie. Take me out of here. Let's go to your apartment.'

'Sure. John! Tell John I don't want the wine. Just bring the cheque.'

They went home and she told him about Dr Reddington. She spent the night there because she was afraid, and Eddie went to sleep in a chair, watching her while pretending to read. He became exhausted by the first experience of the desire to kill a man.

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The next morning, Tuesday, Liggett got awake with an average hangover, the kind that reminded him of mornings after football games and boat races, except that after a night's drinking like last night's he could count on partial recovery within a few minutes after answering the call of nature, and after a day of strenuous athletics nature does not always call, at least not before he was at top form. It always seemed to Liggett that too hard rowing stiffened the muscles of the intestines, resulting in constipation, which resulted in boils. Drinking had for him no such effect. A trip to the bathroom and the worse of this kind of hangover was gone. A shot of tomato juice with a generous dash of Worcestershire sauce, and a cup of black coffee and a plate of cream of tomato soup - that was his breakfast on mornings like this.

Emily came in while he was eating his soup. 'Did anything happen about the case?'

'I couldn't find Casey. I'll get in touch with him today.'

'There's some on your vest. Here, I'll get it.'

'No, it's all right. I'll do it.'

'I'll do it. You'll stain it. Let me.' She scraped off the splash of soup with a knife. 'There.'

'Thanks.'

'Let's go to the theatre tonight. I want to see Bart Marshall. And you like Zita Johann.'

'Bart Marshall? Who is he?'

'Herbert Marshall. I was being funny.'

'What are they playing in?'

'"Tomorrow and Tomorrow." By Philip Barry.'

'Oh, yes. Well, all right if you get the tickets. Who shall we ask?'

'I thought we could ask the Farleys. We'll be going to the country soon and I dislike not having seen her since last summer. What made me think of them was they were at the club Sunday, and Mrs Farley's a nice woman. I like her.'

'Yes, I saw him. He was with a fellow that said he knew me at New Haven. A Jew.'

'Oh, ho. You?' Emily laughed.

'What are you laughing at? I have nothing against Jews. I have some good friends Jews. Paul and Jimmy. You know I like them.'

'Oh, I know, but not while you were in college.'

'Listen, don't you go around saying things like that. This is no time for that kind of snobbishness. Have the Farleys by all means. Her brother is a great friend of Al Smith's. You get the tickets, and what about dressing?'

'I think a black tie.'

'Yes. Farley's always very well dressed, and if you don't specify black tie he's liable to come in tails, and I'll be damned if I want to put on tails this late in the season. Is this play any good?'

'Josie liked it.'

'What the hell does she know about anything?'

'You *like* Josie. I've heard you say you liked her.'

'Oh, you mean Josie Wells. I thought you meant Josie Demuth.' He wiped his mouth with the napkin lengthwise. He looked at his watch, and then had to look again to see what time it was. 'I'll be home as early as I can. I'm going to Philadelphia on the ten

woman, who, if she has anything at all — beauty, ugliness, charm, bad taste, good taste, sex appeal — begins with a quicker identity and holds it longer than a man does. And so they would go to parties together, or simply go home together. Every day she would meet him.

After a while it began to be a habit that to Nancy was not an unmixed blessing. At first occasionally, and then every day, Paul would come up in back of the car and gently pinch the back of Nancy's neck. In the beginning it was cute, she thought. Then she found that she was expecting it. Then she found she was setting herself against it, tightening her nerves and sitting in the very middle of the front seat, hoping he would not be able to take her by surprise. But he always did. It became a game with him, and she could count on the fingers of one hand the number of times when luck was with her and she was quicker than he. They had a phaeton then, a Packard. When they were buying a convertible one thing she had in mind was that she would be able to raise the window on her side and he would not be able to touch her neck. This was no good, though; he would get the same surprise effect by rapping hard with his ring on the raised window. Little by little the custom of meeting Paul every day became a nuisance, then almost a horror. It made her jittery, and all because he was doing something she at first thought was cute, sweet. After they would get in the car it would take her a few minutes to get her mind on what he was saying. A few times, on days when the weather was fine and he had reason to expect her to meet him, she just could not bring herself to face it — although face it was precisely not the word — and she would find excuses not to turn up. At such times he would be so hurt that she would tell herself she was a little beast; Paul was so kind and considerate and sweet in everything else, what on earth was the matter with her that she couldn't pass over such a slight fault? But this self-reproach did not have any lasting effect. It was a form of self-indulgence that certainly did not solve the problem.

As for coming right out and telling Paul she objected to his pinching the back of her neck — that was out of the question. From conversations with her friends, and from her own observations, Nancy knew that in every marriage (which after all boils down to two human beings living together) the wife has to keep her mouth

shut about at least one small thing her husband does that disgusts her. She knew of a case where the marriage was ruined because of the husband's habit of allowing just a little of the white of egg to hang from the spoon when he ate soft-boiled eggs. In that case the disgusting thing occurred every morning. She knew of another case where the husband walked out on his wife because he said she was unclean; it took one of those psycho-analytical quacks a month to get the man to reveal that the woman never went to the bathroom without leaving toilet paper floating in the bowl of the toilet. Things like these that you kept quiet about, they were worse than the things you could quarrel about; your husband's behaviour in bed, or your wife's; his taste in clothes, or hers; cheating at games, flirtatiousness, bad manners, differences of opinion, repetitiousness, bragging and humility and punctuality and the lack of it and all the other things that people can quarrel openly about. Then there was always the hope that please God he might stop. But no; he probably did it because he thought it was expected of him.

Now this Tuesday, Nancy Farley, with nothing to do all day, began thinking of Paul's little trick early in the day. It was going to be a fine day. There wasn't a cloud in the sky and no chance of any legitimate excuse not to meet Paul. This same day, this idleness gave her plenty of chance to think from time to time of John Watterson, the homely actor who everyone said had more charm than - well, everyone said he had more charm than anyone they ever knew. Watterson came of an awfully good Boston family and he had gone to Harvard, and he usually played hard-boiled parts, although he looked well in tails. He reminded some people of Lincoln; he was tall and homely like Lincoln, and Lincoln must have had a marvellous voice too. Watterson had. What with one play and another, Watterson had reached that point where he could be identified by his first name: 'Are you going to John's opening?' meant Watterson as surely as Kit and Alfred and Lynn and Helen and Oggie and Jane and Zita and Bart and Blanche and Eva and Hopie and Leslie meant the people that those names meant. Watterson certainly had arrived, and having arrived he had quietly settled down to the practice of his profession, on and off the stage.

The first thing Nancy said about him when she first laid eyes on him was that there was an honest man, which she amended to

there is a man with honesty. He had hair like an Indian's, straight and black and it fell over his forehead - never with any attempt on his part to keep it from falling. He had big thick lips and out of them came the sounds of this hard strong voice of his in a Chicago accent which he never tried to change, except when he played the captain of an English mine-sweeper and in his one try at the films, when he played an Indian. He was used to being told he had beautiful hands. They were big, and on the little finger of each hand he wore a signet ring which had had to have more gold put in to fit his fingers. He liked women whose buttocks just fit his spread hands, and although Nancy did not quite qualify, she was still on the small side. He wanted Nancy.

She had seen him probably a dozen times offstage. This was extremely painful to him, as he was every bit as aware of the number of times he had seen her as Nancy was of the number of times she had seen him. But it had always been Mr Watterson and Mrs Farley. The last three times she had seen him he had asked her to come in some afternoon, any afternoon, when she was in the neighbourhood and had a minute. That was as far as he would go. If she came it would be with the understanding, et cetera. She knew that. And he knew as well as the next one what his reputation was, and all the women he knew also knew his reputation. 'I have no cetchings,' he would say, 'but I'll bet I can get you tight.' Yes, he had honesty, and he was in the phone book.

It was Spring and Nancy had nothing to do all day until the daily ordeal with Paul, and last week she had seen Watterson and that time he had said: 'You haven't come in for a drink, Mrs Farley. What about that?'

'I haven't been thirsty.'

'Thirsty? What has thirsty got to do with it? I'm going away for the week-end, but I'll be back Tuesday and I'm in the phone book, so I think you'll need a drink: Tuesday. Or Thursday. Thirsty on Thursday. Or Wednesday. Or any other day. But beginning Tuesday.' Then he had laughed to take the curse off it a little and also to let her know that of course he didn't think for one minute she'd come.

Once in her life with Paul, Nancy had let herself go in a kiss with another man, a hard kiss, standing up, with her mouth open and her legs apart. Now that she thought of it, that had been an

actor too. A young actor, a practically unknown juvenile. This day, thinking about Watterson, and then about the juvenile, she went back to a truth which she had discovered for herself. It was something she discovered watching the progress of the extra-marital love life of her friends – while pretending not to watch at all. The truth was that there is a certain kind of man, attractive and famous in his way and sought after by women, whom sound women, women like Nancy herself, can conceivably have an affair with, but would not marry if he were the last man on earth. Once Nancy had heard the French wisecrack: that you can walk in the Bois without buying it. (It sounded better than the American: why keep a cow when milk is so cheap?) She would use the Bois remark to justify the behaviour of some men whom she liked without liking their behaviour. Only in the past three or four years had she even attempted to apply it woman to man. Well, she would not marry a man like Watterson, but since there were men like Watterson, why not find out about them? Why not find out about at least one other man? She knew every hair on Paul's body; they knew everything about each other that they might be likely to learn. A new man would be all strange, and Nancy wondered about herself, too. Maybe she was all strange, to herself as much as to any new man. And this was a good time to find out. As coolly as that she made up her mind to have an affair with John Watterson the actor.

She was sitting down with *The Good Earth* in front of her. She put it aside the moment she made her decision, got up and went to the closet where her hats were perched on things that looked like huge wooden collar-buttons. She took two hats, tried on both of them, and went back to the closet and took out a third, which she kept on. Gloves, purse, cigarette extinguished, and she was ready to go.

The car was parked outside. She got in and drove the few blocks to the block in which Watterson lived. When she came to his house she drove right past without changing her speed. Somehow – not today. She had a hunch. 'If my foot had eased its pressure on the accelerator I'd have gone in. But it didn't, so, not today.' She went to the movies – dear George Arliss, in 'The Millionaire'. 'I suppose that's passing up an opportunity,' she said to herself, thinking of Watterson, and enjoyed it over and over again.

'Do you want some coffee? I made some coffee if you can stand it,' said Eddie.

'Huh?' said Gloria. 'Oh. Eddie. Hello, Eddie darling.'

'Hello, sweet. How about some coffee?'

'I'll make it. Just give me a minute to wake up.'

'You don't have to make it. It's made. All you have to do is drink it.'

'Oh, thank you.' She sat up in bed and reached with both hands for the cup and saucer. She drank some. 'Good,' she said.

'You make this?'

'Yes, ma'am,' said Eddie.

He sat down easy on the bed so he would not jounce it and cause her to spill the coffee. 'Did you have a good sleep?'

'Mm. But marvellous,' she said. Then: 'What about you? Where did you sleep? My beamish boy.'

'Right here.'

'Where "right here"?' she repeated.

'There. On the chair.'

'There, there, under the chair. Run, run, get the gun,' she said.

'No, where did you sleep, Baby?'

'The chair, I told you.'

'You couldn't. With those legs? You couldn't sleep in any chair with those legs. What did you do with your legs?'

'I didn't do anything with them. I just put my fanny deep in the chair, and my legs - I don't know. Extended. They extended in a, uh, south-westerly direction and I went to sleep and my legs went to sleep.'

'Ooh, you must feel like the wrath of God. Are you stiff?'

'No, as a matter of fact I feel fine. I was so tired when I went to sleep. I read a while after you dropped off, and I went to sleep with the light on. I woke up I guess around three or four and doused the light and got up and got an overcoat. Reminds me. You know that fur coat you came here in Sunday. It's still in my closet. You better haul off and do something about it. Take it back where you got it, will you?'

She seemed to think about it.

'Will you?' he said. 'It's none of my business, Gloria, and what you do is - as I just said, it's none of my business, only I wish you'd return that coat. That's the kind of a fast one that - maybe you

and every reason in the world to take it from the man who can't
keep a coat like that, that cost him on the hundred dollars or
more.'

'Four of five thousand.'

'Jesus! All the more reason. My God, Harry, a coat like that
what kind of money, they insure those things. The more money the
more they'll have detectives parked on our doorstep.'

'I doubt it. I imagine I could keep that coat as long as I wanted
to.'

Eddie looked at her but not long. He stood up. 'Do you want
some more coffee? There is more if you want it.'

'You don't like that, do you?'

'What difference does it make whether I like it or not? I told
you what I thought. I have no say over you.'

'You could have. Come here,' she said. She held up her hands.
He sat on the bed again. She put her arms around his head and
held him to her bosom. 'Oh, you don't know what I'd do for you,
my precious darling. You're all I have, Eddie. Eddie, you're
afraid of me. I'm no good, Eddie. I know I'm no good, but I could
be good for you, Eddie, Eddie, my darling. Oh. Here. One second,
darling. One second. My baby. My baby that needs a haircut. Ah
my - *What's that!*'

'Phone,' he said.

'Answer it. It's bad luck not to answer it.'

'I never heard that.'

'It is. Go on, darling, answer it.'

'Hello,' he said into the telephone. 'What? Yes. Speaking.'

'ause.
'Why, you son of a - ' he slammed the phone into its cradle.
The Bush Brothers Hand Laundry. The bastards.'

'Is that the laundry you owe the money to?'

'Oh, God. Maybe it is. I forgot the name of that one. I don't
think I ever did know it. No, it couldn't be the same one. The
Bush Brothers were soliciting new work, so that's not the laundry
that has my stuff. They don't want any new work. I want you.'

'Do you? Here I am. Can anybody see us from those windows
over there?'

'They might. I'll get it. I'll do it.'

'I ought to get up.'

'No, don't.'

'I'll have a child.'

'Don't you want a child?'

'Yes, very much. But, all right.'

He sat up again and looked away. He made his gesture of shooting a foul in basketball, but with his fists clenched. 'No,' he said.

'It's all right, Eddie,' she said. 'It's all right, darling.'

'No,' he said. 'No, it isn't. It's anything *but* all right.'

'I'm clean. You needn't worry about that, if that's what's worrying you.'

'Oh, I know. I wasn't thinking that.'

'You used to think it. Didn't you?'

'A long time ago. Before I knew you.'

'I'd never do that to you.'

'I know. I don't think that any more. That's not what I'm thinking now.'

'Don't you love me? Do you love Norma?'

'Nope.'

'Have you told her you love her?'

'Once or twice.'

'Does she love you?'

'No. I don't think so. Maybe.'

'You're not sure.'

'Oh, I'm sure. She doesn't love me. No, it hasn't anything to do with Norma. I love you.'

She touched his shoulder. 'I know. And I love you. The only one I ever did love, and the only one that ever loved me.'

'I doubt that. Aw, you're *crazy*.'

'No. I know. I know what it is even if you don't. Or maybe you do know and won't say it. It's because I've stayed with so many men that you think -'

'Don't talk. Don't say anything.'

'All right,' she said, and was silent, as was Eddie. Then she went on: 'If you didn't know I'd stayed with so many men would you love me?'

'I do love you.'

'But it would be different, wouldn't it? Of course. It's stupid of me to ask you that. But will you answer this truthfully? If you

'No, it isn't. Not in my present state.'

'Oh - do you really feel - '

'No, no. Not seriously.'

She got out of bed and put on his bathrobe with her arms folded in front of her and her shoulders slightly hunched. She smiled at him and he smiled back. 'I guess - I guess I never felt worse. Not sad. It isn't sadness the way I and you think of sadness and everybody else thinks of it. It's just this, that the one thing we have - nope. I won't say it.'

'Oh, you've got to finish it now.'

'Must I? Yes, I guess I must. Well, it's awful when you think that you've stayed with so many men and made such a mess of your life, and then someone you really want to stay with you because you love him, that person is the one person you mustn't stay with because if you do he immediately becomes like the rest, and you don't want him to become like the rest. The thing he has that the rest haven't is that you haven't stayed with him.'

'No, that's wrong. I don't want you to think that. It isn't true. Maybe it is, but I don't think so.'

'No, I guess not, but - I don't know. The hell with it. You go on out for a walk. Ten minutes, and when you get back I'll be dressed.'

'I'll buy a coffee ring.'

She stood at the bathroom door, watching him put on his coat. 'I'm a real bitch, Eddie. Do you know why?'

'Why?'

'Because I know what's right, but I'm so strongly tempted. You've never seen me without any clothes on, have you?'

'I'll get the coffee ring.'

'That's right,' she said.

When he did not return in fifteen minutes she began to worry, but he did return in ten minutes more, and they had more breakfast. He brought also a container of orange juice for her and a morning paper. 'Mm. Legs Diamond's arrested,' she said. 'I met him once.'

'Who didn't?' said Eddie. 'What did they arrest him for? Parking near a fire plug, I'll bet.'

'No. The Sullivan Law. That's uh, buzz buzz buzz buzz. Weapons. Deadly weapons in his possession. By Joel Sayre. This is

an interesting article. Yes, I met Legs Diamond. What did you say? Who didn't? Lots of people didn't. I met him and the boy I was with didn't know him, even by reputation, and he kept making cracks. Governor Roosevelt's mother is sick and he's going to Paris where she is. She's in the hospital. Did you know that he has infantile paralysis? I never knew that till about a month or two ago. It never shows in his pictures, but he's always holding on to a state policeman's arm. Mm. As an aftermath of the. It says here as an aftermath of the airplane crash in which Knute Rockne lost his life the Fokker 29's are being given the air by the Department of Commerce. I can use Fokker in a sentence.'

'I can use identification in a sentence. I'm not going away this summer because identification till October.'

'Minc was dirty. Oh, the Pulitzer Prize. "*Alison's House*"? Now for God's sake. "*Alison's House*." And *The Collected Poems of Robert Frost*. Well, I suppose that's all right. Edmund Duffy. Have you read *The Glass Key*?'

'No.'

'It's by the same man who wrote *Maltese Falcon*, but it's not nearly as good. Oh, here's one for you. Listen to this. This is old Coolidge. "Collins H. Gere, buzz buzz buzz buzz belongs to a generation of strong character and high purposes. Their passing marks the end of an era." Whose passing? Does he mean strong character and high purposes' passing? Maybe he does. Maybe he's right. Do you know anybody with strong character and high purposes?'

'You.'

'No, that's insulting. Think of someone. It has to be our generation, not older people, because Coolidge says their passing marks the end of an era, I guess he means the era that had strong character and high purposes. You, now. Let me see. Have you a strong character, darling?'

'No character.'

'I'd say yes. About the high purposes, I'm not so sure. How are you on high purposes?'

'Low.'

'No character and low purposes.'

'Not low purposes,' he said. 'I just said I was low on *high* purposes. It isn't exactly the same thing.'

'No, you're right. Well, I can't think of anyone I like that has strong character and high purposes. The Giants beat Brooklyn, if you're interested. Six to three was the score. Terry tripled, scoring when the Giants worked their squeeze play, Vergez laid down a perfect bunt. That shouldn't sound dirty, but when you have a mind like mine. I must look at Bethlehem Steel. My uncle has some of that. Closed at 44½. That's enough of that. Oh, here is sad news. Clayton, Jackson and Durante are splitting up. Schnozzle is going to Hollywood and they're breaking up. Oh, that's sad. That's the world's worst. Why did you have to show me this paper? No more wood number? No more hats? No more telegrams like the one he sent: "Opening at Les Ambassadeurs as soon as I learn how to pronounce it." Ah. That makes me sad, really sad. I hope he divides his salary with the others. Do you like this hat? On the right hand page. . . . On me.'

'No. It hides the eyes.'

'All right. I must go home to the bosom of my family. A flat chest if I ever saw one. Shall I call you tomorrow?'

'Yes. Oh, how about that fur coat?'

'I don't know. I'll call you tomorrow.'

'Well, aren't you going to give it back to this fellow?'

'Well, I can't just take the coat to him, can I?'

'I don't see why not,' said Eddie. 'If you want to return the coat, you can. The way you do it is up to you.'

'All right, I will then, if it'll make you feel any better. I'll call him up right now.' She telephoned Liggett. 'He's out of town, his office said.'

'Well, phone him tomorrow.'

She went home and there was a telegram there from Liggett, asking her to meet him at their favourite speakeasy at four. They had told her at his office that he was out of town, but her life was full of inconsistencies like that.

She was there before four, and took a small table by herself and watched the world come in. That afternoon the speakeasy was visited by a fairly representative crowd. On their lips soon would be her name, with varying opinions as to her character. Most of these people were famous in a way, although in most cases their fame did not extend more than twenty blocks to the north, forty blocks to the south, seven blocks to the east and four blocks to the

west. There were others who were not famous, but were prominent in Harrisburg, Denver, Albany, Nashville, St Paul-Minneapolis, Atlanta, Houston, Portland, Me., Dayton, and Hartford. Among these was Mrs Dunbar Vicks, of Cleveland, in town on one of her three or four visits a year to see a friend's private collection of dirty movies and to go to bed with a young man who formerly worked for Finchley. Mrs Vicks was standing at the bar, with her back to Walter R. Loskind, the Hollywood supervisor, who was talking to Percy Luffberry, the director. Percy owed a great deal to Walter. When Percy was directing 'War of Wars' he had small charges of explosive buried here and there in the ground, not enough to hurt anyone, but enough so that when the charge was set off the extras in German uniforms would be lifted off the ground. The extras had been warned about that and were being paid a bonus for this realism. It went all right until Percy decided he wanted to have one extra crawling along the ground instead of walking. When the charge was set off the extra lost both eyes, and if Walter hadn't stood by Percy, Percy would have been in a hell of a fix. Seated directly across the room was Mrs Noel Lincoln, wife of the famous sportsman-financier, who had had four miscarriages before she found out (or before her doctor dared tell her) that a bit of bad luck on the part of her husband was responsible for these misfortunes. Mrs Lincoln was sitting with pretty little Alicia Lincoln, her niece by marriage, who was the source of cocaine supply for a very intimate group of her friends in society, the theatre, and the arts. Alicia was waiting for a boy named Gerald, whom she took to places where girls could not go unescorted. Bruce Wix, the artists' representative, came in and tried to get the eye of Walter R. Loskind, but Walter did not look. Bruce stood alone at the bar. Henry White, the writer, was told he was wanted on the telephone - the first move, although he did not know it, in the house technique of getting rid of a drunk. On the way out he bowed to Dr (D.D.S.) Jack Fry, who was arriving with one of his beautiful companions. It was afternoon, so the companion was not wearing the Fry pearls, which Dr Fry always loaned to show girls and actresses while they were out with him. Mr and Mrs Whitney Hofman, of Gibbstville, Pennsylvania, arrived at this time, wishing they had been better friends so they could find something to talk about without self-consciousness. The

were joined by Whitney's cousin Scott Hofman, a cross-eyed fellow who at the age of thirty did not have to shave more than once a week. Mike Romanoff came in, looked around the room, and went out again. A party of six young people, Mr and Mrs Mortimer House, Mr and Mrs Jack Whitehall, and Miss Sylvia House and Mr Irving Ruskin, were told at the door that they could not come in because they had not made reservations. They had to make way for a Latin-American diplomat whose appointment to Washington showed what his country thought of this. He had had malaria *before* he caught *siflis*, which is the wrong order for an automatic cure. Inside again, banging on his table for a waiter, sat Ludovici, the artist, who had several unretouched nude photographs of Gloria which she wished she had back. He was with June Blake, show girl and model, who after four days was still cheerful over winning nearly a thousand dollars on Twenty Grand. The bet had not been made through a bookmaker, and involved no cash outlay on her part. It was a slightly intricate arrangement between herself and Archie Jelliffe, the axle man, who told June he would place the bet for her if she would agree to bring to his country place a certain virgin he wanted to know better. Was it June's fault that the former virgin was at this minute in a private hospital? Robert Emerson, the magazine publisher, came in with his vice-president, Jerry Watlington. Emerson was trying to make life pleasant for Watlington, who had just been blackballed at a good club which Emerson belonged to. Emerson sincerely regretted the blackball, now that he had put it in. Mad Horace H. Tuttle, who had been kicked out of two famous prep schools for incendiarism, was there with Mrs Denis Johnstone Humphries (whose three names seldom were spelled right), of Sewickley Heights, near Pittsburgh. Mrs Humphries was telling Horace how she had to drive around in a station wagon because strikers stoned her Rolls. The worst of it was she was riding in the Rolls at the time, personally holding her entry for the Flower Show, and when the stones began to beat against the car she had presence of mind enough to lie on the floor, but forgot about the roses and crushed them. Her story was not interrupted when Horace nodded to Billy Jones, the gentleman jockey, who walked quickly to the bar with two dollars in his hand, had a quick double-whiskey-soda, and walked out, with the two dollars in his hand.

The bartender simply entered it against Billy's account - Billy was supposed to be a little screwy from knocks on the head. Kitty Meredith, the movie actress, came in with her adopted son, four years old, and everybody said how cute he was, what poise, as he took a sip of her drink.

'I'm sorry I'm late,' said Liggett.

Gloria looked up. 'It's all right,' she said. 'In five more minutes I'd have gone, or at least I wouldn't have been alone.'

'Who? That one that's looking at you now?'

'I won't tell you,' she said.

'Uh, what are you drinking?'

'Ale.'

'One ale, and a brandy and soda.'

'Well, what's it all about?' said Gloria. 'I went home and your telegram was there. I phoned you at your office, but they said you'd gone away.'

'Where were you last night?'

'Oh, no. Not in that tone. Who do you think you are?'

'All right, I'm sorry.' He went through the business of getting a cigarette lit, then he remembered and offered her one. That doubled the delay before he said: 'If what I want to ask you makes you very angry will you try not to hold it against me? First of all - please let me talk - first of all, I think you know I'm crazy about you. You know that, don't you?'

No answer.

He repeated: 'You know that, don't you?'

'You said not to interrupt.'

'Well, you do know that, don't you?'

'I'm not so sure. Crazy about me doesn't mean anything.'

'Well, I am. In the worst way. Don't make a joke about it. I am crazy about you. I can't think of anything but you. I can't make sense for thinking about how long it's going to be before I see you again. When I don't know where you are, like last night I was here and all over, trying to find you.' He saw she was not paying much attention.

'You're right,' he went on. 'That's not what I want to talk about. At least not now. Or I mean I want to talk about it now, but there is another matter.'

'That's what I thought.'

'That's what you thought. Well - Jesus, I wish we were some place else. Drink your drink and we'll get out of here. What I want to say I don't want to say in this madhouse, all these people yelling their heads off.'

She gulped some beer and left some in the glass. 'That's all I want.'

He left two dollar bills and a quarter on the table and they went out. He refused the taxi at the door, but walked down the block towards Fifth Avenue and took a taxi that was moving. 'Fortieth Street and Seventh Avenue,' he told the driver.

'Where are we going?'

'That place you took me to the other night. The newspaper place.' He took off his hat and held it on his knee. 'You know, Gloria, I'm in a bad way about you. The thing that's happened to me usually happens to men I know who have been good husbands. I don't mean that I've been an especially bad husband. I've been good to my wife in most ways. I've always kept things from her that would hurt her -'

'You're the kind of man that would have a mistress and insult her in front of your wife because you thought that would mislead her.'

'You're wrong. No, you're right. The only time I had a mistress that my wife knew I did say disparaging things about her, the mistress. How do you know these things? You're not more than I'd say twenty-two. How do you know these things?'

'How do I know them? What else has there been in my life but finding out things like that? But go on, tell me about what happens to men of your age.'

'What happens to men of my age. What happens to men of my age is this, if they've been good husbands. They go along being good husbands, working hard and having a good time playing golf, making a little money, going to parties with the same crowd, and then sometimes it's a woman they've known all their lives, and sometimes it's a filing clerk in the office, and sometimes it's a singer in a night club. I know of one case where it was a man and his sister. Not that they ever did anything about it, except that the man committed suicide, that's all. He'd been happily married - oh, what the hell am I talking about, happily married. Is anybody happily married? I often wonder whether anybody is.' He stopped talking.

'What made you stop all of a sudden? You were going great.'

'Was I?'

'I'll say.'

'I just discovered something, or almost did. Wondering whether anyone was happily married. I wondered if I was, and then I wondered if I wasn't. God, I'm in a worse spot than anyone. I don't even know if I'm unhappily married. I don't know anything about myself. I must be happy, because whenever I've looked back and remembered times when I was happy, I always find that I didn't know I was happy when I was. Well, if I'm happy now it's because of you. Let me rave. I'm thinking out loud.'

'A little too loud for the taxi driver, or else maybe not loud enough.'

'Well, that's all he's going to hear. This is the end of the line.'

This time they were not greeted by the voluble bartender, but by a tall sad man who looked as though he ought to be a Texas Ranger. They went to the small room off the bar where there were booths, and when the bartender brought their drinks Liggett began: 'I didn't feel like talking about this in the taxi. Now I have to talk and get it over with. Gloria, did you take a fur coat out of my apartment Sunday?'

Silence.

'Did you? Are you not answering because you're angry, or what?'

'What do you think?'

'I'm asking you.'

'Yes, I took it.'

'Well - will you give it back? It's my wife's coat, and I've had a hard time keeping her from telling the police.'

'Why don't you let her tell the police?'

'Do you really want the coat that much?'

'I could have it, couldn't I?'

'Yes. You could, but not very easily. Uh, naturally it would break up my home. The first thing the detectives would do would be to question the employees of the apartment house, and the elevator operator would remember your leaving with the coat on Sunday. Then they'd tell my wife there was a girl in the apartment Saturday night, and while my wife might possibly suspect my being unfaithful, for the sake of the children I don't think

she'd forgive my bringing anyone into her home. It's her home, you know, even more than it is mine, or as much. Well, so that would break up the home, but that wouldn't be all. When the police are notified in a thing like that they like to make an arrest, so they'd probably find out who you were.'

'From you?'

'No. Not from me. They could arrest me, I suppose, but I wouldn't tell them who it was. But from - did you take a taxi? You must have. Well, they'd find out where you went, and so on. They have ways of finding out, without any help from me. So you wouldn't have the coat long. And what if my wife told the insurance people? That would fix me in a business way. Not that there's much left to be fixed, but at least I have a good job. Well, if my wife became vindictive and told the insurance people to, uh, proceed just as though I were a stranger they would arrest me for compounding a felony or accessory before the fact or something like that, and the tabloids would get hold of it. No, you can't win.'

'Crime does not pay, eh?'

'I don't know whether it does or not, but I do know this, you won't gain anything by keeping the coat.'

'Except the coat.'

'Not even the coat. They'll take it away from you. Oh, come on, don't be unreasonable. I'll buy you a coat just like it.'

'It's an expensive coat.'

'It's insured for I think four thousand dollars. That's quite an item for an insurance company to have to make good on. What are you doing, having fun?'

'A little. You had fun with me Saturday night. Big stuff, tearing my dress and all that old cave-man act.'

'I'm sorry about that. I've told you before I was sorry.'

'It didn't sound very convincing before, but now that you're in a jam -'

'Listen, God damn it -'

'Don't swear at me. I'm going.'

'Oh, no, you're not.'

'Oh, yes, I *am*, and don't you try to stop me, if you know what's good for you.'

'Listen, you little bitch, I'll go to jail before I let you get away

with this, and you will too. Sit down.' He reached for her hand, but she ran out to the bar room.

'Let me out of here,' she said to the bartender.

'Don't open that door,' said Liggett.

'Out of the way, mister,' said the bartender.

'What is it, Joe?' said a man at the bar, who Liggett saw was in uniform. The man turned, and it was a patrolman's uniform. The cop put on his cap and came over.

'Don't hurt him. Just let me out,' said Gloria.

'Is he molesting you, lady?' said the cop.

'I just want to get out,' said Gloria.

'Listen, officer -'

'Out of the way, wise guy,' said the cop, and in some manner which Liggett did not understand the cop put his hand inside Liggett's coat and held him by the vest high up. He could not move. They let Gloria out and the cop still held Liggett.

'Wuddle we do with him, Joe?' said the cop. 'You know him?'

'I never seen him before. Who are you, anyway?'

'I can identify myself.'

'Well, identify yourself,' said the cop.

'If you let me, I will,' said Liggett.

'Stand in back of him, Joe, just in case.'

'Oh, I won't do anything.'

'Huh, you're telling me. You picked the wrong spot to try anything, fellow, didn't he, Joe?'

'Just leave him try something, he'll find out.'

'I happen to be a very good friend of Pat Casey, if you're interested,' said Liggett.

'A friend of Pat Casey's,' said the cop. 'He says he's a friend of Pat Casey's, Joe.'

'Wuddia know about that,' said Joe.

Whereupon the cop slapped Liggett back and forth on the face with the palm and the back of his hand. 'A friend . . . of Pat . . . Casey. Don't give me that, you son of a bitch. I don't care if you're a friend of the Pope of Rome, any . . . son . . . of a bitch . . . that tries to . . . skeer me . . . with who he knows. Now get outa here. Pat Casey!'

'Go on. Get out,' said Joe.

Liggett could hardly see. There were tears in his eyes from the cop's slaps on his nose. 'Like hell I will,' he said, ready to fight. The cop reached out and pushed him hard and quick, and he went down on his back. Joe, who had been standing in back of him, had knelt down back of his legs and all the cop had to do was push and down he went. He fell outside the speakeasy on the stair landing, and the two men began kicking him and kicked him until he crawled away and went down the stairs.

He had no hat, he could hardly see, his clothes were a mess of dirt and phlegmy spit that he had picked up on the floor, he was badly shaken by hitting his coccyx when the cop pushed him, his nose was bleeding, his body was full of sharp pains where they had kicked him.

To be deprived of the right to fight back when you have nothing left to lose is awful, and that made Liggett feel weak. They had beaten him in a few minutes worse than he ever had been beaten before, and he knew he could have gone on fighting now till they killed him, but they would not give him the chance, the bastards. Outside the world was disinterested or perhaps even friendly, but there was no fighting outside. It was inside, upstairs, where there was fighting, and he wanted to go back and fight those two; no rules, but kick and punch and swing and butt and bite. The only thing was, he was facing the street now, and it was too damn much trouble to turn around, and inside of him he knew he did not have the strength to climb the stairs. If he could be transported up the stairs and inside he could fight, but the stairs were too much. He heard the door upstairs being opened, then closing as his hat landed at his feet. He reached down painfully and picked it up and put it on his aching head, and walked out to the street. He stumbled along into a taxi. The driver didn't want him to get in, but was afraid to take a chance on crossing him. Then as the driver said: 'Where to?' Gloria opened the door of the cab.

'It's all right, I know him,' she said.

'Okay, Miss Wandrous,' said the driver.

'Out. Get out. Get outa my tax'cab,' said Liggett.

'Go to 274 Horatio Street,' Gloria told the driver.

'Okay,' said the driver, and reached back to close the door, which had clicked only once.

Liggett got up and opened the door, mumbling: 'I'm not going

anywhere with you.' She tried to stop him but not very hard. It wasn't much use trying and the streets were full of people; little people coming up from the fur centre to pile into the southernmost entrance to the Times Square subway station. She saw Liggett get into another cab.

'Will I folly him?' said her driver.

'Yes, will you please?' she said.

Her taxi followed his to within a block of his home. She stopped and watched him get out, saw the doorman at his apartment pay the cab driver. 'Go to the Horatio Street number,' she said.

Eddie did not answer his bell, though she rang for five minutes. She left a note for him and went home.

Chapter 6

You could still read a newspaper in the street when Nancy and Paul Farley arrived at the Liggetts'. Nancy was wearing a printed chiffon frock, Farley was wearing a dinner jacket with shawl collar, a soft shirt, a cummerbund instead of a waistcoat, and pumps. The pumps were old and a little cracked, and in his hand he had a grey felt hat that certainly did not look new. Emily wondered where she had got the idea Farley would be dressed like something out of the theatre programmes. Where? From Weston, of course. Where, where was Weston? What had happened in Philadelphia?

'Good evening, Mrs Farley, Mr Farley. Let's go in here, I think it's cooler.'

'It is cool, isn't it?' said Nancy.

'Bobbie did this building,' said Paul.

'A friend of ours,' Nancy explained. 'Robert Scott. The architect. Do you know him, by any chance?'

'No, I don't believe I do,' said Emily. 'All right, Mary. The cocktail things. Mr Farley, do you mind if I pass that job on to you? My husband hasn't arrived! He went to Philadelphia this morning and I expected him home at four, but I could have been mistaken. Perhaps he meant the four o'clock train, which arrives

told me a Martini ought to be shaken very hard, briskly, a few vigorous shakes up and down, so that the gin and vermouth would be cracked into a proper *foamy* mixture. He said Americans, especially in these dark ages – I mean Prohibition, not the depression. We have a tendency to drink a cocktail in two gulps, for the effect, whereas if you shake the cocktail the various ingredients go into solution more completely, and the result is a foamy drink – not very noticeably foamy, but more foamy than not – and you have a cocktail that you can sip, almost like champagne.’

‘Oh, I never heard that,’ said Emily. ‘It does sound like a plausible theory, as you say.’

‘You see, our cocktails, stirred, are syrupy and very strong. Two Martinis out of a stirred batch have much more effect than two shaken ones. Stirred cocktails are little more than straight gin and vermouth. So we’ve followed his advice and I must say I think he’s right.’

‘Let’s do it that way, then. I’ll get the other shaker. This one has only the stirring kind of top.’

‘Oh, no, not if it means – ’

‘Not at all,’ said Emily. ‘I want to try your way.’ She went to the dining-room and came back with a shaker.

‘I noticed you have new cocktail shakers too,’ said Nancy. ‘You know, we have newer cocktail shakers and things like that than a cousin of Paul’s. She was married five years ago, and by actual count she was given twenty-two cocktail shakers for wedding presents. All sorts. And those she kept look positively obsolete compared with ours. Ours are all new, within the last two years.’

‘When Weston and I were married no one would have thought of giving a cocktail shaker.’

‘We didn’t get a single one,’ said Nancy.

‘There,’ said Paul. ‘I hope you like this after all my build-up, Mrs Liggett.’

She tasted her cocktail. ‘Oh, yes, by all means. Oh, even I can see the difference right away.’

‘Isn’t it a lot better?’ said Nancy.

‘Yes. Weston will like it too, I know. His favourite drink is whiskey and soda. He’d almost rather not drink cocktails for that reason, that they’re too syrupy. This ought to be the solution of the cocktail problem for him. Speaking of Weston, I think we’ll

wait five more minutes and if he hasn't arrived we'll begin without him. He's usually so punctual about meals, and I know he was especially anxious to be on time for the Farleys. I hate being late for the theatre, so we'll give him five more minutes. I'm so glad you hadn't seen "Tomorrow and Tomorrow". Herbert Marshall has *such* charm, don't you think so, Mrs Farley?"

'Just about the most charming man I know. Not that I know him. I did meet him.'

'I don't see how he gets around with that leg of his,' said Paul.

'I can't even tell which one it is, and I watch every time,' said Nancy.

'He lost it in the war, didn't he?' said Emily.

'I believe so,' said Nancy.

'Yes, he did. He was in the British Army,' said Paul.

'Not in the Austrian Army, dear?' said Nancy.

Everyone laughed politely. 'As a matter of fact he was in the Austrian Army,' said Paul. 'He was a spy.'

'No, no. That's not getting out of it,' said Nancy. 'Besides, that's not original. Who was it said that first? You read it in the *New Yorker*.'

'What was that?' asked Emily.

'Oh, you must have seen it. I think it was in the Talk of the Town column. George S. Kaufman, you know, he wrote "Once In a Lifetime" and a hundred other plays.'

'Yes,' said Emily.

'Well, he and some of the Algonquin literati were together one night and there was a stranger in their midst who kept bragging about his ancestry, and finally Kaufman, who is a Jew, spoke up and said: "I had an ancestor a Crusader." The stranger looked askance and Kaufman went on: "Yes, his name was Sir Reginald Kaufman. He was a spy."'

'All right, except that it was Sir Roderick Kaufman,' said Nancy.

Emily laughed. In one more minute she would have taken her guests in to dinner, but before the minute was up the doorbell rang and then the door was opened and Liggett came in, supported by the elevator operator and the doorman, who Emily noticed first was trying to take off his cap.

'Oh, God,' said Emily.

'Good Lord,' said Paul.

Nancy sucked in her breath.

'What in God's name happened, darling?' said Emily, going to him.

'I'll take this arm', said Paul to the doorman.

'Please let me walk by myself,' said Liggett, and shook off his helpers. 'I'm terribly sorry, Mrs Farley, but you'll have to excuse me tonight.'

'Oh, well, of course,' said Nancy.

'Can't I give you a hand, old man?' said Paul.

'No, thanks,' said Liggett. 'Emily - will you - I think Mrs Farley, Mr Farley.'

'Let me help you to your room,' said Farley. 'I think I ought to do this, Mrs Liggett.'

'I'd rather you didn't, Farley. Thanks just the same, but I'd really rather you didn't,' said Liggett. 'Apologize to you, Emily, before the Farleys.'

'Oh, they understand I'm sure,' said Emily. 'Mrs Farley, Mr Farley, you will excuse us I know?'

'Of course,' said Farley. 'If you want me to do anything?'

'No, thank you. I'll manage. I'm sorry.'

'Come on, darling,' said Nancy. 'Anything at all, Mrs Liggett. Please call us.'

'Thank you both,' said Emily.

The Farleys left. Nancy could hardly wait till they got inside a taxi where only Paul could see her crying. 'Oh, what a terrible thing. What an awful sight.' She put her arms around Paul and wept. 'That poor unhappy woman. To have that happen to her. Ugh. Disgusting beast. No wonder, no wonder she has such sad eyes.'

'Yes, and the son of a bitch was no more in Philadelphia than I was. I saw him getting tanked up at the Yale Club at lunch time. He didn't see me, but I saw him.' He waited. 'But it's nothing for you to be upset about, darling. They aren't even close friends of ours.'

'I'll stop,' said Nancy.

'We'll go to Longchamps.'

'No, let's go where we can drink,' said Nancy.

When Gloria came home in time for dinner her uncle told her he would like to have a talk with her before dinner, or after dinner, if there wasn't time before dinner. She said they might as well talk now, before dinner.

'Well,' he began, 'I don't think you've been looking at all well lately. I think you ought to get out of New York for a month or two. I really do, Gloria.'

Yes, she had been thinking that too, but she wondered how often he had had a chance to see her to decide she wasn't looking well. 'I haven't saved anything out of my allowance,' she said, 'and as for work - well, you know.'

'This would be a birthday present. It's a little early for a birthday present, but does it make any difference what time of the year it is when you get your present? I'll send you a penny postcard when your birthday comes, and remind you that you've had your present. That is, providing you want to take a trip.'

'But can you afford it?'

'Yes, I can afford it. We don't live on our income any more, Baby' - he often called her that - 'we've been selling bonds and preferred stocks, your mother and I.'

'Oh. On account of me? Do I cost that much?'

He laughed. 'No-ho-ho. You don't seem to realize. Don't you know what's been going on in this country, Baby? We're in the midst of a *depression*. The worst depression in history. You know something about the stock market situation, don't you?'

'I looked up your Bethlehem Steel this morning or yesterday. I forget when it was.'

'Oh, that's all gone, long since, my Steel. And it was U.S. Steel, not Bethlehem.'

'Oh, then I was wrong.'

'I'm glad you took an interest. No, what I've been doing, I've been getting rid of everything I can and do you know what I've been doing? Buying gold.'

'Gold? You mean real gold, the what do they call it - bullion?'

'The real article. Coins, when I can get them, and gold bars, and a few gold certificates, but I haven't much faith in *them*. You know, I don't like to frighten you, but it's going to be a lot worse before it's any better, as the fellow says.'

'How do you mean?'

'Well, I'll tell you. A man I know slightly, he was one of the smartest traders in Wall Street. You wouldn't know his name, because I don't think I ever had occasion to mention it except perhaps to your mother and it wouldn't have interested you. He was a *real* plunger, that fellow. The stories they told downtown about this man, they were sensational. A Jew, naturally. Why, say, that fellow *couldn't* lose. *And*, he was shrewd, the way all Jews are. Well, as I say, he's always been a pretty smart trader. They say he was the only one that called the turn in 1929. He got out of the market in August 1929, at the peak. Everybody told him why, you're crazy, they all said. Passing up millions. Millions, they told him. Sure, he said. Well, I'm willing to pass them up and keep what I have, he told them, and of course they all laughed when he told them he was going to retire and sit back and watch the ticker from a café in Paris. Retire and only thirty-eight years of age? Huh. They never heard such talk, the wisenheimers downtown. Him retire? No. It was in his blood, they said. He'd be back. He'd go to France and make a little whoopee, but he'd be back and in the market just as deeply as ever. But he fooled them. He went to France, all right, and I suppose he made whoopee because I happen to know he has quite a reputation that way. And they were right saying he'd be back, but not the way they thought. He came back first week in November, two years ago, right after the crash. Know what he did? He bought a Rolls Royce Phantom that originally cost over eighteen thousand dollars, he bought that for a thousand-dollar bill. He bought a big place out on Long Island. I don't know exactly what he paid for it, but one fellow told me he got it for not a cent more than the owner paid for one of those big indoor tennis courts they have out there. For that he got the whole estate, the land, the house proper, stables, garages, everything. Yacht landing. Oh, almost forgot. A hundred and eighty-foot yacht for eighteen thousand dollars. That figure I do know because I remember hearing he said a hundred dollars a foot was enough for any yacht. And mind you, the estate was with all the furniture. And all because he got out in time and had the cash. Everything he had was cash. Wouldn't lend a cent. Not one red cent, for any kind of interest. Not even a hundred per cent interest. Just wasn't interested, he said. Buy, yes. He bought cars, houses, big estates, yachts, paintings worth

their weight in radium, practically. But lend money? no. He said it was his way of getting even with the wisenheimers that laughed at him the summer before when he said he was going to retire.'

'Uncle, did you say you *knew* this man?' said Gloria.

'Oh, yes. Used to see him around. I knew him to say *hello* to.'

'Where is he now? I mean what ever became of him?'

'Ah, that's what I was going to tell you,' said Vandamm. 'I was inquiring about him, whatever became of him, about a month or two ago, and fellow I see every once in a while, a professional bridge player now. I mean makes his living that way, but he used to be a customer's man. I ran into him a short time ago at the New York A. C. and we had a glass of beer together, just friendly because he knows I don't go in for playing bridge for high stakes. We got to talking and in the course of the conversation Jack Wiston's name - that was his name, Jack Wiston, if you want to know his name. His name came up and I asked this friend of mine what ever became of Jack? "Didn't you hear?" my friend said. Very surprised. He thought everybody knew about Wiston. Seems Wiston had the yacht reconditioned and started out on a trip around the world. I understand he had a couple of Follies girls with him and one or two friends. When they got to one of the South Sea Islands, Wiston said that was as far as he was going, and sent everybody on home in the yacht. Bought himself a big copra plantation -'

'I've always wanted to ask that, what's a copra plantation?'

'Uh, copra? It's what they get cocoanut oil from. So -'

'I've often wondered when I read stories in the *Cosmopolitan* -'

'Well, that's what Wiston must have done too, because it was one of those Dutch islands. The story that got back was that Wiston didn't believe in big nations any more. Large countries, doomed to failure, he said. The trend was the other way. There wasn't a single major power in the world that wasn't in sorry straits, but take any little country like Holland or Belgium and Denmark, they were weathering the depression better than any large country, irregardless of which one it was. The way I heard, he said he was thirty-eight, thirty-nine then, years of age, he had his good health and a reasonable expectation of at least twenty more years of an active life, and he didn't want to be beaten to death or shot next year, 1932.'

'What?'

'That's his theory. Next year, according to Wiston, is a presidential year, and we're going to have a revolution.'

'Oh, hoocy.'

'Well, I don't know. A lot of fellows are taking that seriously. A lot of people think there's going to be a change. Looks like Al Smith might get in or Owen D. Young. Some Democrat. But will things be any better? I doubt it. Hoover must have something up his sleeve or things would be a lot worse than they are right now.'

'But you said a revolution. What kind of a revolution? You mean radicals? I know they talk all the time, but I'd rather have Hoover - well, not Hoover, but I wouldn't want to be governed by some of those people. I've met some of them on parties and they're awful.'

'Yes, but what about the farmers? They're dissatisfied. What about in Pittsburgh, all those big factories closed down? I don't know where it's all going to end up. All I can do is do the best I can for you and your mother, so every chance I get I'm turning everything into gold.'

'You're not a chemist. You're an alchemist,' said Gloria.

'Ah ha ha ha ha. Very good. Quite a sense of humour, Baby.'

'Dinner, you two,' said Gloria's mother.

'I'm ready,' said Vandamm. He whispered to Gloria: 'I'll talk to you later about the vacation.'

*

Liggett's story to Emily that night was that he and his friend Casey had gone the rounds of Hell's Kitchen speakeasies, trying to do their own detective work. An old enemy of Casey's turned up, Liggett said, and there was a free for all.

The next day he told her the truth, keeping back only the name of the girl.

He awoke that day stiff with pain and with an early realization that there was something ahead that he had to face. It was totally unlike the feeling he had in the war, when he would know each night that the next morning there would be a bombardment and the danger of an attack; it was less unlike the nervous fear in the days when he first began to row in college; the race day would be

long until the race started in the late afternoon, and full of things to worry about, but then the boring alumni and muscle-feelers and door-openers would start coming around noon and by starting time the race was almost a pleasant escape. No, this was more like the time he had gonorrhea and had to force himself to the doctor's office, horribly in ignorance of what the treatment was going to be. He had known men with it, of course, but he was sure his was a special case and he could not talk to anyone about it. This morning was like that and like a time when he stayed away from the dentist for two and a half years. It was the knowledge that the unpleasant thing ahead was something that he himself had to force himself to do, that it was in his own hands, no one else could make him do it.

He thought he was awake very early and long before Emily, but when he groaned a little in a way that was like a sigh, she was standing at his bed before his eyes were fully open. She had been sleeping in a chaise-longue which she had moved into his room. His first angry thought was that she had done that to try to catch what he might say in his sleep, but her manner and her words changed this: 'What is it, darling?'

He looked up at her, taking a good look at her for a change.

'Go on back to sleep, darling. It's ten minutes of six. Or shall I get you something? A bedpan?'

'No. I don't want anything.'

'Does it hurt? Is it painful where they hit you?'

'Who hit me?'

'The men, the friends of Casey's that beat you up. Oh, you poor dear. You haven't tried to move. You don't know yet that you're hurt. Well, don't try to move. You've been badly beaten up, darling. Do you want me to get in bed with you? I'll keep you warm and I won't bump you. You don't want me to close the window, do you? Get some more sleep if you can.'

'I think I will,' he said. Then: 'What about you?'

'Oh, don't worry about me. It's almost my regular time to be up, anyway. The girls will be awake in another half or three quarters of an hour.'

'I don't want to see them.'

'I know. I won't let them come in. You go on back to sleep. I'll connect the buzzer.' She referred to the line which ran from

'Shh.'

'Is it time for school?'

'No,' Emily whispered.

'Good.' Ruth smiled and closed her eyes again, then opened them again to say: 'Why are you up so early?'

'I don't want you to make any noise. Daddy isn't feeling well and we mustn't make any noise.'

'What's the matter with Daddy?'

'He was beaten up in a fight last night.' Emily did not know what she was saying until she had said it. It had not occurred to her to lie to this child of hers. The words were out, and Emily looked for a reason for the frankness. She could find none.

'Oh,' Ruth said it and said it again: 'Oh.'

Emily could see what was going on in her mind, could tell it from the two ohs. The first was pain and the quick sympathy that you would expect from Ruth. The second was wanting to ask how, where, when, by whom, how badly – and a firm control of her tongue.

'He wasn't *badly* hurt,' said Emily, 'but they hurt him. When Barbara wakes up don't say anything about it to her, dear.'

'She'll be noisy, though. You know how she always is.'

'Tell her Daddy has a headache and not to make any noise.'

'Is there any thing I can do? I don't want to go back to sleep now.'

'The best thing is to keep quiet, not to make a sound that will disturb Daddy.'

'How did they hurt him?'

'In the ribs mostly, and punched him in the face. Don't worry about him, Ruthie. Try to sleep again.'

She smoothed her daughter's hair, as though Ruth had a fever, and ended with a few little pats on the forehead. She went to the kitchen and started the coffee percolator. She sat down and waited, staring straight ahead and thinking about Ruth with her lovely intelligent innocent eyes, and her sing-song voice when she said: 'What's the matter with Daddy?' All the innocent things about her eyes and her face and her ruffled hair and her voice – then she thought of the form outlined under the bed-clothes. At this minute, probably in New Haven or in Cambridge, some young man who would one day . . . No, it would be all right. It would

be love with Ruth, one love. Barbara was the one to worry about, with one love after another, and many pains and the need for watching. Emily thought she knew for the first time why she thought oftener of Ruth. The reason was that Ruth and she understood each other; Ruth understood about Barbara, and she understood about herself. That was good - but it was too neat. No; if Ruth understood so much then she must be unhappy about something else. What? She went back to the thoughts of Ruth's little-woman's body. It was all there, ready to move in on life; the breasts were small, but they were there; the hips were not large, but they were there; and part of the intelligence, or part of the information behind the intelligent look of the eyes was the knowledge Emily had imparted to Ruth nearly two years ago. Ruth knew the mechanics of the female, as much as could be told in words. No, no. The look of those eyes, it wasn't an intelligent look; it was just that they were intelligent eyes. There was a difference. But Emily made up her mind that she would watch Ruth with boys, *because of love*.

She poured the coffee and took a cup in to Weston's room. 'I brought you some coffee,' she said.

What she did not know was that he had meanwhile manufactured the antagonism that was necessary before he could tell her the truth. Also he wanted to tell her because he felt that if he told her the truth as it was up to this minute, he would not be so much to blame if something else was going to happen - and he was not by any means sure that nothing else was going to happen. He had to see Gloria again, he knew that, and he knew that even though he didn't want Gloria now, the next thing he would want would be Gloria.

'Will you get me a cigarette out of my coat pocket, please?' he said. 'Thanks, Emily. I want to tell you something. That's probably the last favour I'll ask you to do for me, and when I tell you what I'm going to tell you you won't want to do any more.'

'Do you have to tell me now?'

'Right now. I won't go through the day wanting to tell you. I'll go crazy if I do.'

'Well, in that case.'

'You sound almost as though you knew what I was going to tell you.'

'I can guess. It's about a woman.'

'Yes.'

'Well, I don't want to hear it now. I know you've been unfaithful. You've stayed with another woman. I don't want to hear the rest of it at this hour of the morning.'

'Well, you'll have to hear it. If you don't mind, please, I want to tell you now.'

'Why?'

'Emily, for Christ's sake.'

'All right.'

'I want to tell you the truth about this because it's a very special thing. Can you look at it this way? Can you, uh, think of me as someone you know that has nothing to do with you, not married to you, but someone you know? Please try to. Well, this man, me, last Saturday night. . . .'

From the time he reached the point where he told about bringing Gloria to this apartment Emily did not try to follow his words. He told the story in chronological order up to that point, and she got a kind of excitement out of listening and wondering how he would reach what was for her the climax of the story; the awful climax, but the climax. She knew what was coming, but she never expected to hear the words: 'So I brought her here.' The words were not separate; they were part of a sentence: '. . . got in a taxi and I didn't have any baggage so I brought her here and we had a few drinks and . . .' But the last words that she paid attention to were: 'So I brought her here.' After that he went on and on. She knew his throat was dry because his voice broke a little but she did not offer to get him a glass of water. Every once in a while he would ask if she was listening and she would nod and he would say she didn't seem to be, and then continue. She had been sitting on the bed when he began. Once she changed her position so that she sat in a chair beside the head of the bed and she would not have to look at him. 'Go on,' she would say. Let him talk himself out. She didn't care how long he talked. She was back from Reno, back in Boston, it was 1932, the girls were at Winsor School, she was avoiding her father and his well-meaning solicitousness. Mrs Winchester Liggett. Mrs Emily W. Liggett.

What did people generally do with furniture? What did they do for immediate cash? Wasn't it a good thing that it was so near

the close of the school year? Wasn't it a good thing New York meant living in an apartment? How awful if it had been in a house, a real home? Ah, but if it had been anywhere else he wouldn't have brought that girl here, to an apartment. No, it wasn't so good that New York meant living in an apartment. That was only a consoling thought and not a matter for congratulation. Let him talk.

'... tried to swing at him, the policeman, but ...'

Who cared? Now he was describing the fight. Why hadn't he been killed? He looked so foolish and unrelated to her, with his bandages and bruises. She knew he wasn't asking for sympathy, but she couldn't help denying it to him. What he had asked in the beginning and what she thought would be so hard - to think of him as someone she knew who had nothing to do with her, not married to her, but someone she knew - that was what she felt. Telling the end of the story, or the second half of it, or the latter two-thirds, or whatever it was that remained after 'So I brought her here,' he was like someone who had nothing to do with her, someone not married to her, someone she knew and did not even like, did not even hate. Here was a man whom she could not escape, who was telling a long and pretty dull story about an amour and how he came to be beaten up. Come to think of it she once knew a man like that, a man who got you in a corner and told you long dull stories about his love life, what a boy he was with the ladies, and how he got into fights. The man's name was Weston Liggett.

'Oh, no,' she said.

'What?' he said.

The fool thought she was protesting at something he had said, when she only meant to pull herself together. 'Oh, no, I wasn't think hysterically,' was what she meant to say, but the Oh-so part had come out in spoken words.

'Well, and that's all,' he said. 'I wanted to tell you because I didn't - I couldn't stand lying here and letting you wait on me - what are you, what on earth are you laughing at?'

'You can't stand lying here. I just thought it was obvious that you can't stand and lie down at the same time.'

'Oh, it's funny.'

'No, not funny,' she said, 'but I don't know what you expect me to do. I won't congratulate you.'

'Well, at least I've been honest with you. Now you can do as you please.'

'What do you suppose I please?'

'How should I know. I'll give you a divorce. I mean, if you want a divorce in New York I'll give you grounds.'

'You have. But I don't want to talk about that now.'

'You haven't one word of understanding. Not a single instinct of understanding.'

'Oh, now really.'

'Yes, now really. You didn't even try to understand. The only thing that interested you was that I was unfaithful. You didn't care about anything else.'

'I'm not going to quarrel with you. I'm not going to let you turn this into a little spat. I don't want to talk about it.'

'You've got to talk about it. You've got to tell me what you're going to do. I was honest with you, I told you the truth when I didn't have to. You believed the story I made up.'

'I beg your pardon, but I didn't believe the story you made up. I did at first, but not when I thought over it. I knew there was more to it than that. And don't tell me I've got to tell you what I'm going to do, or that I *have* to talk about it. There aren't any more have-to's as far as you and I are concerned.'

'We'll see.'

'All right, we'll see.'

'Emily,' he said.

She walked out.

He dressed and had breakfast after the girls had gone to school. He knocked on Emily's door and she called: 'Yes?'

'May I see you a minute, please?'

'What about?'

'I'm leaving.'

She opened the door.

'You can stay.'

'Thanks, but I'm not going to. I just want to tell you, first of all, I'm going to a hotel. I'll let you know which one when I've decided. Probably the Biltmore. In the second place, I'll deposit some money for you some time today, five hundred now, and as

much more than that as I can, later in the week. I'm going because I don't want you to take the girls out to the country at least for the time being.'

'Why not?'

'Because they're looking for that Two-Gun Crowley, the fellow that murdered a policeman. He's somewhere on Long Island and there's a big reward out for him. Long Island will be full of crazy people with guns and policemen wanting to shoot this Crowley and it won't be safe. Now please take my advice on this. Stay here till they've captured him or at least till the excitement blows over.'

'What else?'

'That's all, I guess. If you want a lawyer, Harry Draper's good. He isn't a divorce lawyer, but if you were planning to go to Reno, for instance, you won't need a divorce lawyer here. The New York lawyer will have a correspondent in Reno. That's the way they always do it, unless the divorce is contested, then sometimes they -'

'If you don't mind I'd rather not go into details now.' She shut the door quickly, because she suddenly knew by his face that he wanted her, and much as she loathed him, this would be one of the times when he could have her. That was disgusting.

He knew some of that, too.

Chapter 7

THAT same day, Wednesday, a coincidence occurred: Gloria decided she didn't want to see Eddie for a couple of days, and Eddie decided he didn't want to see Gloria for a couple of days.

Gloria went shopping with her mother, purchasing a beach hat with a flowered linen band, for \$8.50; a suit of beach pyjamas with horizontal striped top to the trousers, which cost her mother \$29.50. She bought a surf suit that tied at both shoulders for \$10.95. A one-piece bouclette frock cost \$29.50 and a stitched wool hat with a feather cost \$3.95. Also a linen suit, navy jacket and white skirt, for the incredible price of \$7.95, a woollen sports coat

for \$29.50, a tricot turban with a halo twist was \$12.50, and two pique tennis dresses (with crocheted belt) for \$10.75 apiece. Her uncle had given her mother \$150 to spend and the purchases were practically on the dot of that sum. Gloria made the purchases with practically no interference from her mother and she felt good and went home for the express purpose of sending Norma Day's suit to the dry cleaners'.

She was wrapping the suit in newspaper but she could not resist reading the paper. It was Monday's *Mirror*, and she was surprised to discover that she had missed reading Walter Winchell's column. She skimmed through it for a possible mention of her name (you never could tell) and then she read more carefully, learning that Barbara Hutton was being sent to Europe to forget Phil Plant, that the Connie Bennett-Marquis de la Falaise thing was finished, 'Joel McRae being the new heart.' She read a few lines from that day's instalment of 'Grand Hotel', which was running in the *Mirror*, and then she turned to 'What Your Stars Foretell': 'Today in particular,' it said, 'should bring encouragement to correspondents, typists, writers, and advertisers. Tuesday may be a nervous and upsetting day in many ways, but Tuesday evening as well as Wednesday evening are very satisfactory for pleasure and dealings with the other sex on a friendship basis. Do not expect too much of Wednesday. It is not a good day for anything outside of the regular routine, and Thursday will be a discouraging day for those with tempers. Beware of disagreements and quarrels in business and with your sweetheart. Saturday should be a very encouraging day from almost any angle; you may act with confidence in either social or business matters. This week is favourable for those born Jan. 29 to Feb. 10, Mar. 3-11, April 1-10, May 5-12, June 2-9, July 7-12, Aug. 1-8, Nov. 15-20, Nov. 29-Dec. 5, Dec. 7-11, Dec. 24-28.' Well, her birthday was December 5, so taking it altogether, by and large, if she would be careful today and keep her temper tomorrow - not that she had a really bad temper, but sometimes she did fly off the handle - she ought to have a good week, because Saturday was going to be a very encouraging day from almost any angle, the stars foretold. It might be a good time to plan a trip, and immediately she thought of Liggett. All these clothes, they were for the summer and the trip her uncle was going to give her, but if the weather was nice - but what was she thinking

about? Had she gone completely screwy that she was planning anything with Liggett, when for all she knew he had a fractured skull? What if he had a fractured skull? It would be a nice mess and it wouldn't take the police long to get her mixed up in it. Why, there was a policeman right there in the speakeasy when she ran out. All he had to do was ask the bartender her name, and she'd be mixed up in it. She was frightened and she read over again what it said about Tuesday: '... may be a nervous and upsetting day in many ways.' It certainly had been. It said Tuesday evening was satisfactory for pleasure and dealings with the other sex on a friendship basis, but her relations with Liggett had not been on a friendship basis, not by a whole hell of a lot, as Eddie would say. No, this stuff was right; ordinarily she didn't put much stock in it, but it was like superstitions; maybe there was something to them so it didn't do any harm to be careful. Besides, it was right enough about Tuesday being nervous and upsetting, and when you considered daylight saving time, then all that mess in the speakeasy was part of Tuesday the day, and not the evening. Do not expect too much of Wednesday . . . routine. Well, she would have Eddie's girl Miss Day's suit cleaned, and returned the fur coat, those ought to be routine things. Tomorrow was Thursday, the day to be careful about disagreements and quarrels in business (that ought to cover the coat, so she would forestall any trouble tomorrow by returning the coat today), and she would guard against a quarrel with her sweetheart by returning the coat. How to do it would have to be figured out later. But she did not ignore the case with which she was thinking of Liggett as her sweetheart. Whatever he was, she loved him. 'Don't I?' she asked.

*

When he was alone in his apartment Eddie smoked a pipe. It was one of the few gifts his father had given him that was not cash outright. It had '2Sg' in silver on the front of the bowl, which was the way his father had ordered it, but it happened to be a good pipe and Eddie liked it in spite of the adornment. It was cheaper than cigarettes, and when he had money Eddie usually bought a half-pound or a pound tin of tobacco and laid in a supply of cigarette papers. Thus he almost always had something to smoke.

It was a furnished apartment, and probably had a history, but

the only part of its history that interested Eddie was that it had come down in price from \$65 to \$50 a month. Something undoubtedly had taken place in the apartment to account for the lowering of the rental. As Eddie well knew, the depression did not result in decreases in rents of apartments that took in \$100 a month or less. One-room and two-room apartments cost just as much as they always had, and renting agents could even be a little choosy, for people who formerly had paid \$200 and more now were leasing the cheaper apartments, and paying their rent. So there must have been a reason why this apartment could be held for fairly regular payments of \$50 a month. It must not be inferred that Eddie never had any interest at all in the processes that brought about the reduction. At first he wondered about it a little; the furniture was not the kind that is bought for a furnished apartment and the hell with it. No, this was hand-picked stuff, obviously left there by a previous tenant. Eddie thought it possible that the previous tenant had been slain, perhaps decapitated with a razor. He resolved some day to suggest as a magazine article the idea of going around to various apartments in New York where famous crimes had occurred. The apartment where Elwell, the bridge player, was killed; the Dot King apartment; the room in the Park Central where Arnold Rothstein was killed. Find out who lived in the apartment now, whether the present occupant knew Elwell for instance, had lived there; what kind of person would live in an apartment where there had been a murder; how it affected the present tenant's sleep; whether any concession was made in the rent; whether the real estate people told the prospective tenant that the apartment had a past. It was one of the ideas that Eddie had and rejected for himself because he did not know how to write, but would have passed on to a writer friend if he had any.

It was hard to tell whether this apartment had been a man's or a woman's. The distinguishing small things had been taken away. There was a bed that could be disguised in the daytime with a large red cover; a cheap (it was all cheap) modern armchair; a small fireplace that did not look too practical; a folding bridge table; three modern lamps; a straight-back chair like a '5' with the horizontal bar cut off. Over the fireplace was a coloured map of New York with cute legends, and there was a map of Paris, apparently executed by the same cartographer, on the inside of the

bathroom door. The pictures that remained were an amateur's replica of a Georgia O'Keeffe orchid, and a Modigliani print. There were a few ash trays from Brass Town via Woolworth.

Whenever he shaved Eddie would hum 'I Got Rhythm'. The reason for this was that he once had used the words in a sentence: 'I had crabs but I got rhythm.' He had first thought it up in the bathroom, while shaving, and he would always recall it, at least until something else took its place. Eddie never told anyone he could use the title in a sentence; it was not his kind of humour. Some day he would hear someone else say it and then he would stop thinking of it. That, exactly that, often happened to Eddie. He would make up puns, keep them to himself, and then he would hear them from someone else and they would cease to be his property. It made him wonder; he thought it was indicative of a great lack in himself; not that he cared about the puns, but it was just as true of his own work, his drawing. Once he had an idea that he turned into something; the drawings he did in college. But he also had thought and worked out a technique that was very much like that of James Thurber. In his case he knew it to be reminiscent of the technique employed in a 1917 book called *Dere Mabel*, by Ed Streeter, drawings by Bill Breck, but still he had done nothing with his idea, and then along came Thurber with his idea, and look what he did: everybody knew who Thurber was - and the people who knew who Brunner was were making a pretty good job of forgetting it.

All these things ran through Eddie's mind, which was like blood running through Siamese twins; there was a whole other half of his mind.

Then he began to consider the other half of his mind, and gave himself up a little to the pleasure of the day, the first pleasure of its kind since he had come to New York. For this day, not two hours before he had come here to this apartment and lit this pipe and looked at this furniture and wondered about this lack in himself - two hours ago he had been promised work, and given a half promise of a job. 'I won't say yes and I won't say no,' the man had said. 'All I'll tell you positively now is we can use your drawings.'

The work was for a movie company, in the advertising department, the art room of the advertising department. Eddie had gone there for a job several times two years ago, because he had

was a Stanford man, a couple of classes ahead of him, working in the department. But the Stanford man at that time had been terrified at the idea of being responsible for increasing the company's payroll by another salary. He knew that the officials of the company were worried about their own nepotism and the cousins of cousins were being laid off. And so Eddie had said well, he would leave a few drawings just in case, and never heard any more.

Then this morning he had gone to that office for the first time in nearly two years. He had asked for his old friend and had been told that the friend was in Hollywood. Then could he see someone in the department? Yes, he could see the man in charge of the art room. The man in charge of the art room listened with a mystifying respect to Eddie's account of his experience of two years ago. The man said: 'Oh, I see. You were a personal friend of Mr De Paolo's?'

'Yes, I knew him in college. That's what I was saying.'

'Have you heard from him lately?'

'Well, no, not lately. I understand he's in Hollywood,' said Eddie.

'Yes, but we expect him back in a day or two. Thursday or Friday.'

'Well, then I'll come in and see him then. Will you tell him Eddie Brunner was in? Tell him I have some ideas for him.'

'For Benny the Beetle?' the man said.

'No.'

'He needs some for Benny.'

'No, these are just some of my own drawings I thought he could use.'

'Oh, do you draw?'

'Yes.'

'Mm,' said the man, and put on his thinking look. 'Just a minute, Mr Brunner.' The man left the office and was gone five minutes. He came back with a batch of rough advertising lay-outs. 'Could you do something with these?'

'Jesus, yes. That's just my stuff,' said Eddie. The lay-outs were for a campaign advertising a college picture. 'Do you want me to try?'

'Sure do. I think these are lousy, and the boys in the department just don't seem to get the right angle. No yoomer. They can draw

tits till I want to chew the paper, but these girls are not supposed to have that kind of tits, you know what I mean. What I want is more on the order of John Held Jr. You know. Comedy girls. I want them female, but I don't want to stress the sex angle.' He smiled and shook his head. 'We did a campaign, God damn, boy, we had everything but the old thing in every paper in town. The picture was a terrible turkey, "Strange Virgin", but they almost held it over the second week it did such business, and every other company in town was bellyaching to the Hays office about our ads, so we got the credit for whatever business the picture did. Maybe you saw the campaign?'

'I sure did.'

'The one where she's lying with her legs out like this, and the guy! I did that one *myself*. We even had squawks from André Jacinto on that. He happened to be in town making personal appearances when the ads came out and oh, he called up and he blew the house down, he was that sore. "Listen," he said, "maybe I am like that and maybe I'm not, but you got no God damn licence to put something in the ads that ain't in the picture." That gave me a laugh, because when you take into consideration what that ad looked like he was doing, it'll take a long time before they put that in any picture they make in Hollywood. Maybe over West Forty-sixth Street, that kind of a picture. But for the time being. Well, anyway, that was some campaign. The other companies squawked to the Hays office, but I don't mind telling you I got myself two very nice offers from the companies that squawked the loudest. But with such a college picture we require an altogether different technique. You know? Dames, but cute, and comedy. Stress the comedy angle. I tell you what I'll do, Mr Brunner. I'll take the responsibility on my own head. You go on in and sit down and just give me all you got on a couple roughs like what I have in mind, and if I like them I'll give you twenty-five dollars top price for all we use, then if I like them maybe we can come to some kind of an arrangement about more work in the future.'

Eddie did some drawings and the man said they were sensational. He'd take one anyway. Mr De Paolo would be proud, he said. He made out a voucher for \$25 and told Eddie to come back next Friday. 'Oh, of course if you were going to see Mr De Paolo maybe

'I'll see you before that.' There was just a chance that there might possibly be a regular job there for Eddie.

Before he left the place Eddie of course had found out that his old friend De Paolo had struck it rich; he was in charge of the work on Benny the Beetle, the company's own plagiarism of Mickey Mouse. . . .

On twenty-five a week Eddie figured he could even go to a movie now and then and get a load of Benny the Beetle. It was too much to hope for a steady job in an art department, where they certainly would pay more than twenty-five a week, but if the friendship with De Paolo had got him this far, no telling how far he would get when Polly - De Paolo - came to town, always providing Polly hadn't gone high-hat and wouldn't pass him up. But he didn't think Polly would go high-hat. High-powered, maybe, but not high-hat.

And so Eddie breathed in streams of tobacco smoke, tobacco that he had dug out of the luxurious bottom of the can, where it was still faintly moist and had a flavour. He had \$23 and some change, he didn't know how much, in his kick right now. Five dollars for canned goods would leave \$18 plus, and would assure him of food for at least a week. Take Norma to a show, tickets at Jo Leblang's. Explain the situation to Norma, whom he had permitted to pay his rent on a loan basis, in return for which he put up her kid brother, a junior at the University of Pennsylvania, who came to town every other week-end to see a girl friend of Norma's. Norma had her own money, left her by a grandmother, and she also had a job as secretary to an assistant professor at N.Y.U. She and her brother were orphans and her brother had his own money too, but in trust until he was twenty-one years old.

What about Norma, anyway? Eddie now asked himself. He had the feeling that his troubles were over, temporarily, and he wondered if it wouldn't be a good idea to marry Norma. He thought back over the years, and it might as well have been Norma all along. His succession of girls always had been about the same general type; smallish, usually with breasts rather large for the girl's height; sometimes the girl would be chunky. They had to have a feeling for jazz that was as good as you can expect in a girl. They had to be cute rather than blasé, a little on the slangy side,

and come to think of it, all of them including Norma had to go to bed for one day out of every twenty-eight. They were all fundamentally the same, and probably they were all fundamentally Norma.

About love Eddie was not so sure. The thing that he supposed existed, that kept together a man and woman all their lives and made them bring up children and have a home and that kept them faithful to each other unquestioningly and apparently without temptation - he had not seen that in his own home and so he was not personally acquainted with it. He was not sure that he ever had seen it, either. He knew, for instance, that he saw the parents of his friends in a way that was totally unlike the way his friends saw them. All through his adolescence he practically took for granted that Mr Latham and Mr O'Neill and Mr Dominick and Mr Girardot, fathers of his closest friends of that period, were unfaithful to Mrs Latham and Mrs O'Neill and Mrs Dominick and Mrs Girardot. He never spoke of it, because his friends never did, but if they had he was sure he would have come right out and said what he thought. He had it thought out beyond that: he believed that those fathers were human, and subject to desire, a thing which did not have to be forgiven except in the case of his own father. His own father had inadvertently taught him to accept infidelity in all other fathers but himself. On the other hand Eddie liked absolute faithfulness in a wife, not so much because his own mother practised it, but because as a result of her practising it she became finally a much better person in his eyes than his father. The years of being constant were a lot like years of careful saving, compared with years of being a spendthrift. It was just that it was easier to be a spendthrift than to save. Of course sometimes you saved for nothing better than a bank crash, but even though you lost everything that was in the bank, you still had something around the eyes, something in the chin, that showed you had been a saver. Sometimes he would say to himself: 'Yes, but your mother was pretty stupid.' All right, what if she was? She had kept her promise, which was more than his father had done. Eddie had no liking for the fellows in college who thought it would be swell to have a father who was more like an older brother. If his father had been an older brother Eddie would have been likely to give him a punch in the nose. Not that he

idealized any other father he knew, but because he never met a father whom he regarded as the ideal did not mean that none such existed. Psychology and the lines of thought it indicated mildly fascinated Eddie, and he approved some of it; but he was not willing to ascribe, say, fidelity to a weakness or a dishonesty. Maybe it all did come down to the value of a promise. You gave your word that you would pay back some money, you gave your word that you would not sleep with another woman; in either case it was a promise, and if you couldn't depend on a promise then nothing was any good.

He was always telling himself that when he got older and knew more he would take up the subject of promises. But he hoped the day never would come when he did not believe a promise - just a promise, and not all the surrounding stuff about Gentleman and Honour - was a good and civilized thing.

He was lying on his bed thinking these things, and he suddenly felt disgust with himself. For only yesterday he had come within inches of laying Gloria, and months ago he had promised Norma that he would not stay with anyone else. All his self-satisfied introspection went away and he could not find anywhere in his thoughts that would justify what he had all but done. It was not his fault that it had not been done. There it was, the first time his promise to Norma had been put to a test, and right away, without even thinking about it, he was ready for Gloria, very God damn ready; and it was worse because he had come so close without thinking about it. It was possible that if he had thought it out he would have found a reason, if no other reason than that he would stay with Gloria and stop staying with Norma. Then next he was thinking the thing he always thought when he was getting out of one romance and beginning another: the self-reproach that he was no better than his father; that he was his father's son. Maybe the psychoanalysts would tell him that that helped to explain how he would be faithful to a girl for months, then get another girl and be faithful to her until he was unfaithful. That's the way it had been, and almost the way it was this minute, with Norma and Gloria. But he had not stayed with Gloria; for that break he thanked his luck. If he had he would have had to tell Norma. But he hadn't. That seemed to him an important thing, one of the most important things in his life, and at that moment he decided

he had found the girl he wanted to marry. A laundry called him on the telephone, and that prevented his having an affair with Gloria. Good. Something beyond his understanding had intervened, he was sure of that; maybe it was only his luck. Well, he wasn't going to fool with his luck. When he saw Norma tonight he would ask her to marry him. No money, no job, no nothing. But he knew she was the one he wanted to marry. He laughed a little. He was pretty proud of Norma, and he loved her very much. He was already loyal to her, too; in the sense that in his mind he could defend her against the kind of thing Gloria might say about her: he could hear Gloria calling Norma a mouselike little creature (although Norma was the same size girl as Gloria, and, speaking of mice, it was not hard to imagine someone saying Norma had a mind like a steel trap). Eddie let his loyalty go to Norma and did not try to deny to himself that this probably was at the expense of his loyalty to Gloria.

It was strange about Gloria, how he always had had this feeling of loyalty to her. Offhand he could not recall a time when there had been any need for it; yet he knew that with the life Gloria led there probably were dozens of people who said things about her that, if he heard them, would evoke a loyal response and some kind of protective action on his part. He had been ready to defend Gloria at any time when he might meet someone who said things about her or did things to her. By God it was an instinctive thing: that first night he saw her he lent her money when money was life to him. It saddened him to think of the things implicit in his decision to marry Norma. One of these things was the giving up part. Maybe he was wrong (he admitted) but always it seemed to him as though he and Gloria were many many times on the verge of a great romance, one for the ages, or at least a match for the love and anguish of Amory and Rosalind in 'This Side of Paradise' and Frederick and Catherine in 'A Farewell to Arms'. He nodded to an undefined thought: that yes, to marry Norma was a sensible thing and if out of the hundred pounds of the relationship between himself and Norma there was one ounce sensible thing, that one ounce was an imperfect, unromantic thing. All right; what of it? There never had been much romance in his past romances, and he distrusted romance for his own self; in a sort of Elks-tooth way his father had been a romantic guy, and he was not going to have

idealized any other father he knew, but because he never met a father whom he regarded as the ideal did not mean that none such existed. Psychology and the lines of thought it indicated mildly fascinated Eddie, and he approved some of it; but he was not willing to ascribe, say, fidelity to a weakness or a dishonesty. Maybe it all did come down to the value of a promise. You gave your word that you would pay back some money, you gave your word that you would not sleep with another woman; in either case it was a promise, and if you couldn't depend on a promise then nothing was any good.

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'I just wanted to try it on. They're handy.'

'Well, I don't think so, Gloria. When I'm tempted to buy a dress because I think it's going to be handy, I think twice about it. Those handy dresses, so-called, I should say a woman won't get as much out of one of those as she will out of a really frivolous dress. I mean in actual number of hours that they're worn. Take your black satin . . .'

Clothes, and cooking, and curiously enough the way to handle men, were matters in which Gloria had respect for her mother's opinions. Packing, housecleaning, how to handle servants, what to do for blotches in the complexion, kitchen chemistry, the peculiarities of various fabrics - Mrs Wandrous knew a lot about such matters. It occurred to Gloria that her mother was a perfect wife. The fact that her husband was dead did nothing to change that. In fact that was part of it. And any time anybody had any doubt about how well her mother could manage a house; all they had to do was count up the number of times Gloria's uncle had had to complain. No, her mother was a fine housekeeper, and she knew how to handle men. Gloria often would hear her mother say that if So-and-So did such and such she'd be happier with her husband. What Gloria meant was that her mother, dealing with her kind of man in her kind of life, was just as capable as she was with baking soda in the kitchen. Mrs Wandrous knew what baking soda could be made to do, and she knew what the kind of man she would be likely to have dealings with (who bored Gloria to death) would do. It was almost a good life, Gloria decided. Without regret she recognized the impossibility of it for her; but a pretty good life for someone like her mother.

That Wednesday night after she went to bed she lay there trying, not very hard, to read, and thinking about her mother. Now there was a woman who had known (Gloria was sure) only one man in her entire life. Known meaning slept with. And that had not lasted very long. Yet after twenty years her mother was able to recall every detail of sleeping with a man, almost as though it had happened last night. She had not discussed it at any length with her mother, but now and then a thing would be said that showed how well her mother remembered. Think of living that way! Going to bed these nights, so many nights through so many years; some nights dropping off to sleep, but surely some nights

lying there and saddened by the waste of shapely breasts and the excitement in oneself with a man, and the excitement of a man's excitement. And then nothing to do about it but lie there, almost afraid to touch one's breasts, probably, or anything else; and remembering one man long ago. There was only one possible explanation for being able to live in memory like that, and Gloria felt tears in her eyes at the thought of her father's and mother's love.

It showed, too. It showed in her mother's face. It worried Gloria a little to come round again to a theory she sometimes had that a woman ought to have one man and quit. It made for a complete life no matter how short a time it lasted. Gloria resolved to be a better girl, and after a long but not unpleasant time she fell asleep, preferring her own face but thinking well of her mother's.

She had breakfast in her room. It was too warm a day for breakfast in bed. To have breakfast in bed ought to be a luxury and not a nuisance, and it was a nuisance when covering over the legs was a nuisance, as it was this day. She drank the double orange juice and wanted more, but Elsie, the maid, had gone back to the kitchen out of call. Gloria drank her coffee and ate her toast and poured another cup of coffee. Then a cigarette. While having breakfast she was busy with her hands. With no one to look at her she swung her butter knife like a bandmaster's baton, not humming or singing, but occasionally letting her throat release a note. She felt good.

What, if anything, she had decided the night before had not been changed by the morning and the good night's sleep, principally because she had not fixed upon a new mode of life. The good night's sleep she knew had a lot to do with the absence of her usual morning despair, but it wasn't that she was happy, exactly. It came close to the feeling that she was ready for anything today, whereas if she had come to a solemn decision the night before to be an angel thence-forward, she would now be having a special kind of gaiety - not removed from the despair - that was cap-over-the-windmill stuff. No; today she felt good. The big problem of Liggett would be settled somehow, not without an awful scene and maybe not right away, but it would probably be all right - and that concession was a step in the right direction, she thought. She felt good, and she felt strong.

She looked at the advertisements in the paper while smoking her second cigarette. She had a patronizing superior feeling toward the advertisements: she had bought practically all the clothes she wanted and certainly all she would need. She had her usual quick visit to the bathroom, and then she had a lukewarm bath and she was dressing when her mother called to her that Ann Paul was on the phone and wanted to speak to her, and should she take the message? Yes, take the message, Gloria told her mother. The message was that Ann wanted to have lunch with her. Gloria said she would come to the phone. She didn't want to have lunch with Ann, but she had known Ann in school and did want to see her, so she asked Ann to come downtown if she could, and Ann said she could.

Ann lived in Greenwich where she lived an athletic life; sailing her own Star, hunting and showing at the minor league horse shows, and in such ways using up the energy which no man had seemed able to get to for his personal use. In school Ann, who was very tall for a girl, was suspect because of a couple of crushes which now, a few years later, her former schoolmates were too free about calling Lesbian, but Gloria did not think so, and Ann must have known that Gloria did not think so. She called Gloria every time she came to New York, which was about twice a month, and the last two times Gloria had not been home for the calls.

Ann came downtown, parked her Ford across the street from Gloria's house, and went right upstairs to Gloria's room. Ann was in the Social Register, which fact impressed Gloria's mother as much as Gloria's indifference to it. Ann was always made to feel at home in Gloria's house.

'I had to see you,' said Ann. 'I have big news.'

'Ah-hah.'

'What?'

'Go ahead.'

'Why did you say ah-hah as if you knew it? Does it show?'

'No. I knew there was something. You've never looked better.'

'Look,' said Ann, and extended her left hand.

'Oh, you *girl*! Ann! Who is it? When? I mean do I know him or anything?'

'Tell you everything. His name is Bill Henderson and you don't know him and he's at P. and S. and gets out next year and he went

to Dartmouth before that and he's even taller than I am, and I haven't the faintest idea when we're going to be married.'

'How long have you known him? What's he like?'

'Since Christmas. He's from Seattle and he spent Christmas with friends of mine in Greenwich which is how I happened to meet him. I sat next to him at dinner the night after Christmas, and he was the quiet type, I thought. He looked to be the quiet type. So I found out what he did and I began talking about gastroenterostomies and stuff and he just sat there and I thought, What is this man? He just sat there and nodded all the time I was talking. You know, when I was going to be a nurse year before last. Finally I said something to him. I asked him if by any chance he was listening to what I was saying, or bored, or what? "No, not bored," he said. "Just cockeyed." And he was. Cockeyed. It seems so long ago and so hard to believe we were ever strangers like that, but that's how I met him, or my first conversation with him. Actually he's very good. His family have loads of money from the lumber business and I've never seen anything like the way he spends money. But only when it doesn't interfere with his work at P. and S. He has a Packard that he keeps in Greenwich and hardly ever uses except when he comes to see me. He was a marvellous basketball player at Dartmouth and two weeks ago when he came up to our house he hadn't had a golf stick in his hands since last summer and he went out and shot an eighty-seven. He's very homely, but he has this dry sense of humour that at first you don't quite know whether he's even listening to you, but the things he says. Sometimes I think - oh, not really, but a stranger overhearing him might suggest sending him to an alienist.'

'He sounds wonderful! Oh, I'm so glad, darling. When will he go for the ring and all?'

'Well - New Year's Eve he asked me to marry him. If you could call it that. Sometimes even now I can't always tell when he's right. New Year's Eve he was dancing with me and he stopped right in the middle of the floor, stopped dancing and stood away from me and said: "Remind me to marry you this summer."'

'I like that. This summer.'

'No, I guess not this summer. But I don't know. Oh, all I care about is I guess this is it, I hope.'

'It sounds like it to me. The real McCoy, whatever that is. So

what are you going to do this summer? Where is — what's his name? Bill?

'Bill Henderson. Well, he wants to go home for a little while just to see his family and then come back. I — I'm sort of embarrassed, Gloria. I don't really know. When he gets ready to tell me something, he tells me, and I never ask him. But what I wanted to see you about, can you come up for the week-end tomorrow? Bill's coming, and I forget whether he's just getting ready for examinations or just finishing them. See? I don't know anything. I just sit and wait.'

'That's good preparation for a doctor's wife.'

'So everyone tells me. But what about it, can you come?'

'I'd love to,' said Gloria. Then, thinking of Liggett: 'I have a half date for the week-end, but I think I can get out of it. Anyway, can I take a rain check if I can't make it this week?'

'Of course. Do try to get out of the other thing. Is this other thing — would you like me to invite someone for you? I mean is there someone that — I could ask your other date.'

'No. It was a big party, a lot of people, not anyone in particular.'

'Then I won't ask anyone for you till I hear from you. Will you call me? Call me tomorrow at home, or else call this afternoon and leave word. Just say you're coming. And of course if you think you can't come and then change your mind at the last minute and decide you can, that's all right too.'

'All right. I'll most likely call you tonight.' Gloria noticed that Ann seemed to have something else to say. 'What, Ann? What are you thinking?'

'I can tell you, Gloria,' said Ann. 'Darling, I've had an affair. Bill and I. We've had an affair. Almost from the very beginning. Do you think any the less of me?'

'Oh, certainly not, darling. Me?'

'I never knew about you. I've always thought you had, but I could never be sure. It's only in the last six months I found out why you can't be sure. It doesn't show on you. You know? You think the next day you're going to be a marked woman and everybody on the street will know. But they don't. And men. Men are so silly. Mothers tell us all our lives that boys lose respect for girls if they go all the way with. But they must have changed a lot since my mother was our age. At first I was so frightened, and then

I saw that Bill was the one that really was frightened, not I. I don't mean about children only. But they're so helpless. When we're with people I'm quiet as a mouse and sit there listening to the great man, or when we're dancing I think how marvellously witty he is, with his sense of humour. But when we're really alone it all changes. He's entirely different. At first I used to think he was so gentle, terribly gentle, and it almost killed me. But then I realized something – and this isn't taking anything away from him. He is gentle, but the things about him that I used to think were gentle, they aren't gentle. The really gentle things he does aren't the same things I thought were. What I mistook for being gentle was his own helplessness, or practically helplessness. Yes, helplessness. He *knows* everything, being a medical student, and I don't suppose I'm the first for him, but – Lord! I don't know how to explain it. Do you see what I mean at all?

'I think so. I think something else too. I think you two ought to get married, right away. Don't lose any of the fun. Right away, Ann. He has his own money, and you have some I know. There's no reason why you should miss anything. Get married.'

'I want to, and he's crazy to, but I'm afraid of interfering with his studies.'

'It won't interfere with his studies. He might have to neglect *you* a little, but he'll be able to study much better with you than he would being in New York and wishing you were here or he was in Greenwich. No, by all means get married. Just look at all the young marriages there are today. People getting married as soon as the boy gets out of college. The hell with the depression. Not that that's a factor in your getting married, but look at all the young couples, read the society pages and see, and there must be a lot of them that are really poor and without jobs. If you got married now and he goes back to P. and S. next year you'd have the fun of living together and all that, and then he'll probably want to go abroad to Vienna or some place to continue his studies, and that will be like a honeymoon. Your family aren't going to insist on a big wedding, are they?'

'Well, Father thinks it's a good thing to keep up appearances. Mother doesn't like the idea as much as she used to. She'd rather use the money for charity, but Father says he's giving more to charity than ever before and with less money to do it on. He's very serious

about it. You see he knows Mr Coolidge, and I think he thinks if we invited Mr Coolidge to the wedding he'd come, and that would do a lot toward sort of taking people's minds off the depression.'

'I don't agree with your father.'

'Neither do I. Of course I wouldn't dare say so, but I think Coolidge got us into this depression and he ought to keep out of the papers.'

'That's what I think, too.'

'Well, you've given me something to think about. Not that I hadn't thought of it myself, but whenever I broach the subject people say oh, there's plenty of time. But you're the only one that knows we're practically married right now.'

'Oh, no, you're not,' said Gloria. 'Where do you go?'

'Usually to an apartment of a friend of Bill's.'

'Well, then you've - have you ever spent the whole night?'

'Once.'

'That's not enough. *You're* not practically married.'

'Now do *you* know so much? Gloria, don't tell me you're married?'

'Ho, but I know how it is to wake up with a man you love and have breakfast and all that. It takes time before you get accustomed to each other. Who's going to use the bathroom first, and things like that. Intimacies. Ann, I can tell you a lot.'

'I wish you would.'

'I will. God! I know everything!'

'Why, Gloria.'

'Yes, everything. I know how good it can be and how awful, and you're lucky. You marry Bill right away and hold on to him.'

'I've never seen you like this. Why does it mean so much to you? Is the man you love married?'

'You've guessed it.'

'And his wife won't give him a divorce?'

'Yes,' said Gloria. 'That's it.'

'But couldn't you both go to her and tell her you love each other. Is she a nice woman? How old is she?'

'Oh, we've had it out. Not she and I, but Jack and I.'

'Jack. Do I know him?'

'No.' She was on the verge of confessing that his name was not Jack, but she did not want to tell Ann too much. 'Look, darling,

I'll call you tonight for sure and if you're not there I'll leave word that I'm coming or not.'

'All right, my pet,' said Ann, getting up. She kissed Gloria's cheek. 'Good luck, and I'll see you, if not this week, perhaps a week from tomorrow.'

'Mm-hmm. And thanks loads.'

'Oh, I'm the one to thank you,' said Ann, and left.

Gloria thought a long time about how uncontagious love was. According to the book she ought to be wanting to telephone Liggett, and she did want to telephone Liggett in a way, but talking to Ann, virginal Ann with her one man and her happiness and innocence and her awkward love affair (she was sure Bill Henderson wore glasses and had to take them off and put them in a metal case before necking Ann) – it all made her angry with love, which struck in the strangest places. It didn't seem to be any part of her own experience with love, and it depressed her. What possible problems could they have. Ann and Bill? A man from the Pacific Coast comes all the way from the Pacific Coast and finds right here in the east the perfect girl for him. What possible problems could they have? What made them hesitate about getting married? She felt like pushing them, and pushing them roughly and impatiently. They would get married and after a couple of years Bill would have an affair with a nurse or somebody, and for him the excitement would die down. But by that time Ann would have had children, beautiful children with brown bodies in skimpy bathing suits. Ann would sit on the beach with them, looking up now and then from her magazine and calling them by name and answering their foolish questions and teaching them to swim. She would have enormous breasts but she would not get very fat. Her arms would fill out and look fine and brown in evening dress. And, Gloria knew, Ann would slowly get to disliking her. No; that wouldn't be like Ann. But Gloria would be the only person like herself whom Ann could tolerate. Every Ann probably has one Gloria to whom she is loyal. And the girls they had gone to school with, who had made the cracks about Ann's being Lesbian – they would turn out to be her friends, and she would ride with them and play bridge and go to the club dances. They would meet sometimes in the afternoons, parked in their station wagons, waiting for their husbands, and their husbands would get off the train, all wearing

blue or grey flannel suits and club or fraternity hatbands on their stiff straw hats, with their newspapers folded the same way all of them. And she, Gloria, would visit Ann and Bill once each summer for the first few summers, and the men with the hatbands would make dates for New York. Oh, she knew it all.

She tried to laugh it off when she thought of the motion picture she had thought up for Ann's future, but laughing it off was not easy. It was unsuccessful. Laughing it off was unsuccessful because the picture was accurate, and she knew it. Well, every Gloria, she reminded herself, also had an Ann whom she tolerated and to whom she was loyal. Ann's was not her way of living, but it was all right for Ann. The only possible way for Ann, or rather the only good way. Hell, here she was in a bad humour, and for no apparent reason. You couldn't call Ann's happiness a reason.

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In the rear of the second floor of the house in which Gloria lived there was a room which Mrs Wandrous and the rest of the household called Mrs Wandrous's sewing-room. It was small and none of the furniture made you want to stay in it very long. Mrs Wandrous kept needles and spools of thread and darning paraphernalia and sewing baskets in the room, but she did her sewing elsewhere. Occasionally Gloria went to that room to look out the window, and for no other reason.

The sewing-room looked out on the yard of Gloria's house, and across the yard and across the contiguous yard was the rear of an old house which had been cut up into furnished apartments. It was nothing to look at. A woman in that house had a grand piano with a good tone, but her musical taste was precisely that of Roxy, the theatre fellow. In fact Gloria had a theory that this woman closely followed the Roxy programme, except when the programme called for Ravel's 'Bolero' and the César Franck and one or two others that Gloria and Roxy liked. The woman also sang. She was terrible. And this woman was the only human being Gloria identified with the house. On warm days she had seen that much of the woman that was between the shoulders and the knees. The woman did not close the window all the way down on hot days. She never had seen the woman's face, but only her torso. She had seen it in and out of clothes, and it was nothing to go out of your

way to see. And that woman was the only human neighbour that Gloria knew anything about.

But a couple of yards away there was a garden; two yards with no fence between. Grass grew, there was a tree, there were some rose bushes, there were four iron chairs and a table to match with an umbrella standard in the centre of the table. In that garden there was a police bitch and, just now, four puppies.

The last time Gloria had looked out the sewing-room windows the puppies were hardly more than little pieces of meat, not easy to count and completely helpless.

Now they must have been six weeks old, and as Gloria stood and watched them she forgot all about the woman who was playing the piano, for in a very few minutes she discovered something about the family of police dogs: the bitch had a favourite.

The bitch's teats had lost their fullness and had gone back into her body, but that did not make the puppies forget that they had got milk there not so long ago. The mother would run away from their persistent attempts to gnaw at her, but one tan little fellow was more persistent than the others, and when the mother and the tan had got far enough away, the mother would stand and let him nibble at her. Then she would swat him good and hard, but, Gloria noticed, not hard enough for him to misunderstand and take offence and get angry with his mother. The mother would open her surprisingly big mouth and lift him up and swing him away from her, then she would take a mighty leap and fly about the garden, chasing sparrows. Meanwhile the other puppies would be waiting for her and when she met them they would try again to take milk from her. Or maybe they were like men, Gloria thought; maybe they knew there was no milk there. And Gloria had a strong suspicion that the mother really liked their making passes at her. She guessed Nature provided the mother with the instinct to swat the puppies away from her. They were old enough to eat solid food now and as a good mother it was her duty to make them look out for themselves.

The mother was a marvellous person. Gloria found herself thinking this and since she was alone and not thinking out loud she went on thinking it. The mother was a marvellous person. Such good qualities as there must be in her, the way she held up her head and her ears stood straight up, and the way she

'Jefferson Machamer,' she said.

'That's not the way to say it,' said Eddie, and hung up.

Eddie was full of plans, few of them making sense when his income was considered. All Gloria had to do was listen. 'A small car, an Austin or one of those little Jordans. You know those little Jordans? They don't make them any more, but they were some cars. Or I keep seeing an ad in the paper for a baby Peugeot. I just want a small car.'

'Naturally.'

'Why naturally?'

'So you won't have to take anyone else for a ride. You want a car to think in, don't you, Baby?'

'That's right,' he said. 'A car I can think in.'

'And Norma and I, we'll just sit around and sew on Sunday afternoons when it's hot. You go out to the country - the North Shore is nice and cool. You go out and you think and Norma and I will sit and wait for you, and then you come home and tell us what you've been thinking. Understand, if you don't *want* to tell us, or you're too tired, it'll keep. What else are you going to do with your money?'

'Well -' they were at the corner of Fifth Avenue and Eighth Street, halted by traffic. 'You see those figures on top of the traffic lights?' At that time the traffic light standards were adorned on top with gilt statuettes of semi-nude men in trench helmets.

'Uh-huh.'

'Well, I'm going to do something about them. I'm not sure what, but something.'

'Somebody ought to.'

'I may only buy them, all the way from here to a Hundred and Tenth Street, if they go that far, and send them to a silly old uncle of mine who loves to play with soldiers.'

'No.'

'No. You're right. I have a better idea, but I don't know you well enough to tell you.'

'Certainly not.'

'The idea is, how to control female jaywalkers. I would have instead of a light, when it is time for the red light to go on, all the little soldiers would uh, come to attention as it were.'

'As it were.'

'And all the women would stop, see? They would watch this phenomenon and meanwhile traffic would be rolling by. There's only one difficulty. When the women get tired of watching it we'll have jaywalking again.'

'Ho-ho. Women -'

'I know. Women won't ever get tired of watching that phenomenon. This is a *nice* conversation.'

'What about men jaywalkers?' said Gloria.

'We have a jaywalker for a mayor,' said Eddie.

'Oh, stop it. That isn't even original.'

'Yes, it's at least original. It may be lousy, but it's original. Anyway I never heard anyone else say it. That's always my trouble when I make puns.'

'What else with your money?'

'Buy you lunch. Buy you a present. Buy Norma a present -'

'And get a haircut.'

Eddie was gay all through luncheon, long after Gloria grew tired of his fun. She could see that it was more than the prospect of the job that made him feel good. The other thing was without a doubt Norma Day. Always before this when he was gay it did not last so long without encouragement from Gloria; this time he went on, and in a way that in anyone else she would have called stupid. Not stupid in Eddie. Eddie did not do stupid things. And God knows he was entitled to some fun. But twice in one day was too much for this: first it was Ann Paul with her Mr Fletcher - Mr Henderson, rather. Ann was all packed and everything and moving right out of Gloria's life. And now Eddie. She could easily have said the hell with Ann. She didn't like women anyway. Women had no spine. Gloria thought they were more intelligent than men, but they didn't get as much out of it as men did. Unless trouble was getting something out of it. Now that Ann was safe and happy Gloria admitted to herself that what their schoolmates had suspected might easily have been true. It was nothing special against Ann. Gloria had a theory that there was a little of that in practically all women; just get them drunk enough in the right surroundings. And a lot of them didn't have to get drunk. She had had passes made at her by dressmakers' fitters, show girls, women doctors, and - and then she pulled herself out of this. For every woman who

had made a pass at her there were ten, fifteen, a hundred, a thousand, who had not, and who probably had not the slightest inclination in that direction. But admitting that she was factually wrong did not get her out of the general mood. She came back to wishing Ann well, and found herself wanting to be away from Eddie. She was tired of being with him. The only person she wanted to be with was Liggett. She wanted to be home or with Liggett. One or the other. Away from the whole thing, all that was her usual life; Eddie, her friends, the smart places or the gay places, the language she and they spoke, and all about that life. But if she had to have any of it, she wanted all of it. Here, with the bright sun on Fifth Avenue, she was thinking that the only thing she wanted was to be with Liggett, lying in bed or on the floor or anywhere with him, drunk as hell, taking dope, doing anything he wanted, not caring about the time of day or the day of the week and not thinking whether it was going to end. And if not Liggett, then no one. Then she wanted to be home where she could be within sound of her mother's voice, surrounded by the furniture that she would not bump even in the dark. She wanted to be moral. She would stop smoking. She would wear plain clothes and no make-up. She would wear a proper brassière, no nail polish. She would get a job and keep regular hours. And she knew she could do these things, because she knew Liggett would be back. Maybe.

Eddie asked her to have more coffee but she said she had to go home and wait for a call. Like that Eddie understood. His gaiety disappeared, he was considerate, he remembered that she had not been participating in his fun. 'You go on home,' he said. 'I'm going uptown, and I'll take a bus from here.'

'I'm sorry, Eddie.'

'You're sorry? I'm the one to be sorry.'

'It just happens today -'

'I know. Go ahead. Kiss me good-bye.'

'No,' she said.

'All right, don't,' he said. But she did, and at least made the waiter glad.

She went home, feeling like crying part of the way, and then halfway changing to pleased with herself because she was on her way home, which was a path to righteousness or something.

Three o'clock was striking when she let herself in. Elsie, the

maid, was dusting the staircase and could easily have opened the door, but not Elsie. Sometimes Gloria suspected that Elsie, who was coloured, knew something of Gloria's Harlem benders. It may have been that, and it may only have been the contrast between the respectful, almost slave-like obedience Elsie accorded Mrs Wandrous, and the casual, silent manner Elsie showed Gloria.

'Packages come from the stores,' said Elsie.

'For me?' said Gloria.

'Yes,' said Elsie. She spoke it on a high note, as much as to say, 'Why, sure. Who else would be getting packages in this house?'

'Then why don't you say so? . . . Oh, don't answer me.' This was a swell way to start the new life, but this nigger irritated her. 'What's your husband doing now? Is he working?'

'Why?' said Elsie.

'Don't ask why. Answer my question.'

'He's gettin' along. Now and then he gets sumpn. Now may I ask why?'

'You may not.' Gloria was on the verge of mentioning Lubby Joe, a Negro big shot the mention of whose name was enough to command respect among most Negroes. But it would be hard to explain how she knew Lubby Joe, and it was a thing that could not be left unexplained. This made her angry too, to ~~see~~ ~~that~~ ~~she~~ ~~could~~ ~~not~~ ~~finish~~, especially something that would have given her so much pleasure as throwing a scare into Elsie. 'What if you put the packages?'

'Uh cared them all the way up to your room,' said Elsie.

'Yeah, man!' said Gloria, in spite of herself.

She was upstairs, trying on the new clothes, the new dress, in, dust-cloth in hand. 'Some man called you up, he said, "lef' this here number.'

'God damn you, you black bitch! Why didn't you answer my message when I came in?'

'Uh didn't think.'

'Get out of here!'

She called the number, which was 2-12-34, and the extension number which was 5-6-7-8. The number had been a lot of people, but it

She sat there half dressed, too furious to curse Elsie, hating the Negro race, hating herself and her luck. In five minutes she called the number again. It was always possible he was in the bathroom the first time. This time she left word that she had called. 'Just say that Gloria phoned. The party will know.' She only hoped it was Liggett. She was sitting there and she heard the front door close in the careful but not noiseless way her mother closed it. Gloria called to her to come upstairs.

'Certainly is getting warmer. When did you get back? Is Eddie really working?'

'Mother, this is the last straw. I want you to fire Elsie. Today.'

'Why, what's she done?'

'I just had a very important message and she forgot to give it to me till just this minute, and of course when I called the party had left.'

'Well, you know Elsie has a lot to do. She's got this whole house -'

'You can get any number of niggers that will do twice the work and won't forget a simple little thing like that. I'm sick of her. She's lazy -'

'Oh, no. No, she isn't lazy. Elsie's a good worker. I admit she has her shortcomings, but she isn't lazy, Gloria.'

'She is! She's terrible, and I want you to fire her. I insist!'

'Oh, now don't fly off the handle this way over a simple little telephone message. If it's that important the person will call again, whoever it was. Who was it, and why is it so important?'

'It'd take too long to tell you now. I want you to fire Elsie, that's what I want you to do. If you don't I'll tell Uncle Bill. I won't stay here.'

'Now look here, just because Elsie does something bad isn't any reason why you should be rude to me. You have your own way quite a lot it seems to me. Too much for your own good. You go around doing as you please, staying away at night and doing dear knows what and we permit it because - well, I sometimes wonder why we do permit it. But you can't come home and disrupt the whole household because one little thing goes wrong. If you can't appreciate all the things we do, all for you -'

'I'm not going to listen to you.' She went to the bathroom and locked the door. In the bathroom was a dressing-table with

triplicate mirrors and many lights. Even the front of the drawer had a mirror, and whenever she noticed this she thought about the unknown person who designed the table, what he or she must have had in mind: what earthly use could there be for a mirror on a drawer, just that height? What *other* earthly use, that is? It reflected your body right where your legs begin. Did other women really look at themselves as much as she did or what? Yes, she guessed they did, and it was not an altogether unwelcome thought. She wanted to be like other women, now, for the time being. She didn't want to be the only one of her type in the world. She didn't want to be a marked girl, who couldn't get along with the rest of the world. It had started out a good day, and then came Ann, and her joy for Ann didn't hold over an hour; she was bored with Eddie, really her best friend; she fought an undignified fight with Elsie, and she had a quarrel with her mother. Why did days have to start right if they were going to turn out like this? Was it to give you a false sense of security, an angry God, a cruel God, making you feel this was going to be a lovely day, about as swell a little day as you could hope to find, and then - smacko! Four times she had gone smacko! So what about this stuff of starting the day feeling it was going to be a good one? Or maybe it was a merciful God who did it. He gave you a good night's sleep, thereby making you feel good at the beginning of the day, because He knew you were going to have a tough one and you'd need all the optimism you could command. What about God, for that matter? She hadn't thought about God for a long time. Monday she would begin again, because she noticed one thing about people who believed in God: they were warmer people than those who didn't. They had a worse time, but they had a better time too. Catholics. Catholics had more fun on parties than anyone else. The Broadway people were mostly all Catholics or Jews, and they seemed to have a good time. At least the Catholics *did*. As to the Jews, they never seemed to have a really good time. They were too busy showing off when they were supposed to be having a good time. Like Italians. Gloria at this point changed her classification from Catholic to Irish. The people that seemed to have the best time, at least so far as she had observed, were the Irish Catholics who didn't go to Church. Some of them would confess once a year and then they could start all over again. That didn't seem right to Gloria, if you

were going to have a real religion, but it certainly made those Catholics feel good. She decided she wanted to go to a Catholic Church and confess. What a story that would be if she ever told the father all she could tell. The party she went to thinking it was being given by a movie actress and it turned out to be a gangster party, where they had all the girls from a show and the gangsters tied sheets to one girl's wrists and hung her stark naked out the twenty-first-floor window, and when they pulled her in they thought she was dead. All the girls getting stinking as fast as they could because they were afraid to stay sober and afraid to suggest leaving. The two virgins. The dwarf. The very young and toughest of the mob, who never even smiled unless he was hurting somebody. She remembered how frightened she was, because that young man kept staring at her, but the lawyer with whom she had gone to the party told the big shot that she was Park Avenue, and the big shot got enough kick out of thinking his party was shocking her. And it was. She had seen wild parties, but this was beyond wild: the cruelty was what made it stick in her memory. She looked around the bathroom and it made her think of Rome. Rome never saw parties like that. Rome didn't have electric light and champagne and the telephone, thirty-story apartment houses and the view of New York at night, saxophones and pianos. Here she was, just a girl on the town, but about the only thing she had missed was lions and Christians, and she supposed if she hung around long enough she'd have to see that. With an effort she made herself quit this line of thought. It was so real to her that she was sure her mother could hear her thinking. She opened the bathroom door. Her mother had left the bedroom.

She decided to go away. Alone. Think things out. She opened her desk drawer where she kept her money, and she counted more than thirty dollars. Where to on thirty dollars, without asking anyone for more? This place, that place, no, no, no. Then yes: at five-thirty she could take a boat to Massachusetts. The *City of Essex* was leaving at five-thirty. She had enough to go there and back, pay all her meals, tips, magazines. She would take a small overnight bag.

'Miss Glaw-ria, telephone.' Elsie from downstairs.

Chapter 9

THE *City of Essex* was built in the late 1870s, and though to this day she is a fairly sturdy craft, her designers were working to catch the custom of a public that was different from today's. Different in quite a few ways, the citizens of the Republic in the Rutherford Birchard Hayes administration were especially different from the Hoover citizens in regard to the sun. When the *City of Essex* was built, the American people, travelling on ocean-going and coastal steamers, liked to be in the shade, or at least did not feel like climbing from one deck to another just to get sunburned. Thus the *City of Essex* had a top deck that was little more than a roof for the dining-room. It had a sort of cat-walk around this roof, abaft the wheelhouse.

If they were putting that much money into a boat today they would have a place on the top deck where people could lie and sit in the sun when the weather was fine. They would of necessity have proper handrailing along the edge of the deck. The handrailing would be high enough and strong enough to withstand the usual wear and tear on handrailing.

The *City of Essex*, however, was built in the late 1870s, and no matter how amusing passengers might find the elaborate decorations and furnishings of the dining-room, they could not say much for the handrailing along the top deck of this old side-wheeler. That handrailing was too low; it was dangerous.

But one of the last things Weston Liggett was worrying about, two decks below the top deck, was the handrailing two decks above him. The big worry was whether Gloria was on board the *City of Essex*, and there were other lesser worries. He was a man who a week ago had a home and now had only a hotel room. He was insanely infatuated with a girl young enough to be his daughter (he would not call it love: he was too angry with her for that). He had reason to believe that the girl was aboard this old tub, but he was not absolutely sure. He was not positive. What was more, he did not want to take any step toward finding out. He did not want to do any of the things by which he could find out. He did not want to ask the purser (he did not want to have anything to do

with the purser, who was a round-shouldered man with a neatly trimmed moustache; thin, and with a way of holding his cigarette between the knuckles of his first two fingers that made you think right away of a man fast drying up who at one time had been a great guy with the women - a man who would be nastily suspicious of any inquiry about a young woman, rather tall, well dressed, about twenty-two). He did not want to ask a steward or anyone else if such a young woman had come on board. Probably in the back of Liggett's mind all this and the preceding day had been a strong doubt that his marriage had busted up. The habit of married thinking does not break so soon, not if the marriage has had time to mean anything good or bad, and hence the precautions he had been taking: when he telephoned Gloria he did not leave his name, because he was not registered at the hotel under his real name, but under the name of Walter Little. He had made the reservation on the *City of Essex* under the name of Walter Little (the initials were the same as his own). When he tried to reach Gloria he had not left the phony name because he was afraid she would not call back any Walter Little. He had not left his own name because he was almost certain she would not call any Weston Liggett. And so, all the precautions before getting on the boat, and after boarding it. Aboard the *City of Essex* he did not, as he thought of it, wish to show his hand.

So far as anyone could be sure, he was sure that Gloria had no suspicion that he was aboard. She did not know where he was. He had been in his room when she phoned, but he had deliberately not answered. He had not called anyone else from the hotel, and it was therefore reasonable to suppose that any call would be from Gloria. He did not at first know why he had not answered, but the moment the phone stopped ringing he congratulated himself on a master-stroke. Gloria's phoning meant that she was home. It just possibly meant only that she had phoned her home to find out if there had been any messages for her, but that was unlikely. It was more likely that she was home when she phoned his room at the hotel. Acting on his hunches and as part of the master-stroke he took a cab to within a block of her house. He dismissed the cab. He was going to be patient. He had his mind made up that if Gloria was in that house he would wait ten hours if necessary until she came out. He bought a couple of afternoon papers at the newsstand

at the end of Gloria's block, and looking at his watch very big, so that anyone who saw him would think he had an appointment, he stood with his papers, one open, one folded and tucked under his arm. He did not have long to wait. Less than ten minutes after he - as he thought of it - took up his vigil, Gloria appeared, carrying a bag. He got out of her sight until she got into a taxi. Liggett got into a taxi across the street. He pretended to be undecided about where to go (as he certainly was until Gloria's cab got under way). Then noticing that her cab was turning into a one-way street he told his driver to go through that street until he made up his mind. His mind was made up for him. From one one-way street Gloria's cab went to another one-way street, west-bound as was the first. He followed her cab and watched her get out at the Massachusetts and Rhode Island Steamship Company pier. He kept his cab a few blocks longer, got out and took another cab to the M. & R.I. pier, having given Gloria time to get aboard. He knew enough about the M. & R.I. ships, because he had taken them many times when Emily would be spending summers with her family at Hyannisport. He knew that they never left on the dot of 5.30, and he could take the *City of Essex* at the last minute if he so chose. He did so choose, because at next to the last minute a thought came that almost made him give up today's chase: What if Gloria was going on a trip with some other man? Some cheap fellow, to be going on a trip of this kind. It was common and cheap. Worse than Atlantic City. He almost didn't go, but then he thought what the hell? If she wanted to do that, now would be the time to find it out, and if she didn't, it would be a swell opportunity to talk to her and get her to listen to reason about the coat and all the other things he wanted to discuss with her. He felt weak and impotent when he thought how much of his life depended on her consent. Just her consent. A whim, perhaps. She might say no now to something that next week she would say yes to. So much depended on her consent, and her consent depended so much on his approach. If he went at her threateningly she might tell him to go - himself, but if he went at it in the right way he might easily get her to agree to everything. And one of the things he was beginning to want very much to have her agree to was that she should sleep with him tonight. So when he came aboard the *City of Essex* his plan was to lie low and after dinner he would talk to her and arrange some

happened. He hoped she wasn't the kind that gets seasick on Long Island Sound.

On the *City of Essex* there is a narrow space of deck belting all the outside cabins except four on each side of the ship. On the starboard and on the port side are two sets of four cabins each which the reader must remember never to take when travelling in the *City of Essex*. These uncomfortable cabins are just forward of the housing that covers the side-wheels which propel the ship. Liggett had one of these cabins.

There was nothing to do but sit and look out the cabin window. The cabin was very narrow, and Liggett parked his arse on a little stool and put his forearms on the window sill and smoked cigarettes. He took off his coat and was more comfortable, and really it wasn't bad when you looked out the window. The *City of Essex* goes at a pretty good clip down the North River and up the East, under the bridges, past the (Liggett was on the port side) wasted municipal piers of the East River, the unheard-of tramp steamers docked north of the Brooklyn Bridge, and on up into the section from Mitchel Place north, occupied by Beekman and Sutton Place buildings which Liggett knew, inhabited by people he knew. He knew by the sound when he was near and under the Queenborough Bridge. There was so much hysterical noise of thousands of straphangers and motorists hurrying home to their hutches in Queens and Nassau counties. All the way up the river, and especially in the vicinity of Hell Gate Liggett kept thinking what a big job it is to be mayor of New York. All the dock employees, the cop on Exterior Street, the hospital people, the cops of the Marine Division, the people who worked on Welfare Island (which Liggett of course could not see), the hospital people on one island and the rat-fighters on another, the woman who had to live on a city-owned island because she spread typhoid fever, the men running the ferry-boats, the fellows making repairs under one of the bridges - there were enough of them to make up a good-sized (and probably very horrible-looking) city. And the only name they all knew was James J. Walker. Liggett wondered if Walker ever thought of that - and if he did was it a good thing for him to think of? Maybe he thought of it too often. It was too much of a job for one man. Liggett decided that the next time he saw Walker he would tell him he ought to have a rest (although Walker had just got back

himself that those fellows were married. He wasn't thinking much at all; because the sight of a boat speeding husbands homeward did not make him feel good. The next time he went home there would be strain even between the girls and himself. Emily, naturally you would expect it of her. But it would have communicated itself to the girls - if indeed Emily had not actually told them that their father would not be living at home any more. Ruth. The thing that made him kiss her hand in the station wagon. The way she had taken charge at the family luncheon. Oh, the things he wanted to do for her, the things he wanted to do with her. He realized that for a couple of years now he had been having the beginning of anticipation of the day when he would be able to take her out to dinner and the theatre and a night club, to boat races and football games. Probably there wouldn't be many times like that; she was a beautiful kid. 'Jesus, sometimes she takes your breath away,' he thought. Not beautiful in a conventional way. It was more in the eyes, the set of her chin when she was sitting quietly on a porch or in a corner, not knowing she was being watched. He guessed there were no new things that a father could feel about his daughter. But he guessed no father felt so deeply, little though he might show it. You couldn't show it much with Ruth. Kissing her hand like that on Sunday - it had just come over him, and he had done it, and he knew she liked it. That was good. Her liking it. She liked him better than she did Emily. No, but in a different way. And he liked her so much better than when she was a little kid. She got bigger, and your love got bigger. She was more completely a girl, a person, and your love was more complete. He wanted to be with her all the time she was pregnant, when she was having her first baby by the swell young guy she would marry. Not some older guy who had gone around and laid a lot of girls and was out of college five or ten years, but someone her own age. Like those two people in one of the Galsworthy novels, only they were cousins, weren't they? And they had to be careful not to have children. Ruth. Lovely, dear Ruth, that a father could love.

The tears were in his eyes and one or two out over the lower lid, and he became aware that he had not noticed it at first because dusk had come and darkness was coming. The light was gone. You were conscious of the curtains in the windows of the small yachts that the *City of Essex* passed. He was hungry. The clean

feeling he had from loving Ruth did not last long. He remembered what he was to do on this boat.

*

Gloria was hungry too. One more discomfort. The other was that ever since she had come aboard the *City of Essex* she had wanted to go to the bathroom, and she was afraid to go. She had used toilets in speakeasies where to breathe the air seemed pretty risky. But there was something intimate about a speakeasy in the family. No one who went to the same speakeasy as you did would be so mean as to give you something. That was almost the way she felt about speakeasy toilets; but she always took elaborate precautions anyway. But on this old boat everything was so *old*. The women's toilet (as distinguished from the ladies' room in a speakeasy, the johnny at school, the little girls' room at a party in an apartment, and the wash-my-hands on a train) was clean enough, and an elderly Negress was there to sell you safety pins. Gloria took one look, went into one of the toilets, and then came right out. The old Negress probably thought she was crazy, but this was not Gloria's day for caring what old or young Negresses thought. Finally, after failing altogether to win out by 'not thinking about it', she gave in, went to the bathroom, came back, and was ready for a fight or a frolic and a small steak.

She was working on the steak when a woman spoke to her. Gloria was alone at a table for two, the woman was alone at a table for four. 'Always a nice breeze on Long Island Sound, isn't there?' said the woman.

'Yes, isn't there?' said Gloria.

'It's my first ride on one of these boats, although ha ha I've been to Europe several times. But I wanted to take this ride to see what it was like.'

'Yes. Mm-hmm,' said Gloria.

'Just about what I expected. I wonder where we're off of right now do you suppose? Think we passed New Haven? Because I have friends live there. I'm from - I'll bet you didn't come as far as I did for this trip. You're a New Yorker, I can tell that, aren't you?'

'You can tell it to anyone you please,' was what Gloria wanted to say. 'Yes, New York,' was what she said.

'Want to come over and sit at my table? There isn't anyone else sitting here, and we're the only ladies travelling by ourselves I notice.'

'Well - do you mind if I finish my steak? It'd be so much trouble to move now. But thank you. I'll have dessert with you if I may.' She wished she had what some girls had: the ability to get rid of bores, instead of talking nervously and not thinking what she was saying. She didn't want to have dessert with this schoolteacher or whatever she was.

'Then I'll come over to your table. I'm all finished eating, but I'd like to have a cigarette, only I hate to light one here when I'm sitting by myself. It looks funny. Yih know? When yih see a woman eating by herself smoking in a public restrunt. Where are you from? Oh, you did tell me, New York. Tsih. I want to go to New York for a real stay some time. I'm always going some place when I go to New York, on my way to Europe or else home after being to Europe. Oh, did I burn you?' Hot sulphur from the woman's match was scratched loose and stung Gloria's wrist. 'Here, let me have a look. . . . No, it's all right. It may burn a little. I'd put something on it if I were you. Awful the way they make these matches. I suppose that Ivan what's his name made these. The match king, from Denmark. No, Sweden. Do you see that man over there with the cigar? That's the reason why I wanted to sit with somebody. He's drunk.'

'He looks sober,' said Gloria.

'Not, though. Drunk as a coot. Tight as a tick.'

'Tight as a tick. Did you make that up? Just now?' said Gloria.

'Oh, no. Why, we say that all the time at home. Tight as a tick? Didn't you ever say that?'

'Never heard it before in my life. What does it mean? What is a tick?'

'Well, I've always wondered that too, but I guess it must be something tight. It couldn't mean the tick of a watch, because I don't see anything tight about the tick of a watch. What do they say in your crowd when someone is three sheets to the wind?'

'I have no crowd.'

'Well - I mean, your friends. What do they say when someone is under the weather?'

'Oh,' said Gloria. 'Well, I don't think you'd like what they say.'

'Really? Why? Is it risqué?'

'Yes, a little.'

'Tell me. What is it? I won't be shocked.'

'Well,' said Gloria. 'Most of my friends, my *men* friends, they say, "I was stewed to the balls last night." My girl friends -'

'Really. I took you for a lady but I see I was wrong. Excuse me,' said the woman, and stood up and left the room.

'I didn't have to do that, but I guess I had to,' Gloria told herself. 'Now I'd like a drink, and isn't it nice? I won't be able to get one.' She smoked a cigarette, hoping the strange woman would come back and think she looked funny. She went out on deck, and on the radio on deck the Connecticut Yankees were plugging Mr Vallée's recording of 'The Wind in the Willows'. The air was pretty good. There was no moon.

This was one of Gloria's nights for not looking at men. At a party or at a ball, in a railroad station or a public speakeasy, on the street, at a football game, Gloria always did one of two things about the matter of looking at men. She either did one or the other: she either got the eye of a stranger and stared him down, giving him a complete and unmistakable going over the way few American men have the nerve to do with American women; or else she all but did what they call in the movies 'fig bar'. Fig bar is a term which covers the whole attitude of the very bashful child; the toes turned in, eyes lowered, and especially the finger in the mouth. Gloria could be bashful when she wanted to, and she frequently wanted to. She never got over her real terror of a strange crowd. She could not recall a time when this was not true. It was true of her as a child, and on one occasion it had made her do something she never got over regretting. It was at a party, and it was that she had stayed with a man with four other people looking on; two men, two women. The other women wanted to do it, and did, but Gloria was the first. It was one of the few times in her life that she did something that made her repeatedly ask why she had done it. When she discovered that the reason probably was that she was showing off more intensely than ever before, and that the reason for wanting to show off was this unconquerable shyness - it didn't make the whole thing any better. She was glad when one of the women who had seen it, a second-string movie actress, died. That made one less person who had seen it. She wished the others would

die, too. But she did not wish it very strongly, because she knew that the other woman, not the actress, probably wished Gloria dead too. And it did nothing to cure her shyness. It only made it worse. Sometimes just as she was about to enter a bar she would remember the time – and she could hardly force herself to enter the bar. Other times she would be passing a row of tables and she would hate her evening gown for the very things that had influenced her selection of it: its décolleté, the way it fitted over the hips. Full well she knew the movement of her own hips as she walked, as though each hip were a fist, clenching and unclenching, and the rhythm locked forever, reminding her of a metronome. She knew, because she had watched other girls. A girl walks across a room, her hips going *tick-tock tick-tock*. The girl becomes self-conscious and stops at a table, interrupting the rhythm with the hip resting on *tick*; but when she resumes her walk, *tock* goes the other hip, and *tick-tock*.

It was dark on deck and on Long Island Sound. The thin bars of light on Long Island and Connecticut shore were better light than the cheap lamps on deck. Gloria told the steward to put a chair in the middle of the deck for her. She did not notice anyone.

Thus she did not see Liggett, who was leaning against the rail on the starboard side, looking at Long Island and being honest with himself in that he was guessing, and guessing only, the position of the *City of Essex*. When he heard Gloria's heels on deck he tightened up. He knew the sound for the sound of a girl's shoes. He turned and saw that she did not look in his direction. He watched a steward put a chair down for her. He left and went to the dining-room.

The Negro waiter was none too pleasant about giving him something to eat, as it was past the dinner hour, but Liggett was not in a mood for humouring waiters. When the Negro brought the soup Liggett said: 'Take that back. It's cold.' He knew the Negro was making a face at him and when he began to mumble Liggett looked up and said: 'What?' so quickly that you could hardly hear the *t*. All aspirate. Then the white headwaiter came over and asked if there was anything wrong, and Liggett said no, thank you. The Negro picked up the plate and the headwaiter followed, obviously asking him what the hell was going on. The Negro answering the man said the soup was cold, the headwaiter

telling him well, then for Christ's sake bring *hot* soup and be quick about it, and the Negro whining that cole soop want his faul, chef to blame for cole soop and anyway looka what time tis. Liggett was pretty well pleased with the way he had handled the situation, not snitching to the headwaiter.

Abruptly, he stood up. The headwaiter rushed over to him. 'Anything wrong, sir?'

'I don't feel well. I think I'd better have some air.' He didn't feel sick but he certainly didn't want to eat his dinner. 'Never mind the dinner.'

'I'm sorry, sir,' said the headwaiter.

'T's all right,' said Liggett.

He went up on deck again and Gloria was not in her chair. She was standing at the rail on the port side. It was noticeably colder and the only other people on deck were an Italian-American and his wife and two children, the Italian trying to get his money's worth of sea air, and the sleepy wife and children looking up to him for the signal to go to bed.

'Hello,' said Liggett.

Gloria turned to give him cold stare Number 25, but said: 'Good God!'

'I'm quite a stranger,' said Liggett. 'I'll say it for you.'

'I wasn't going to say that. What - how did you happen to be on this boat?'

'You don't think I just happened to be on board, do you?'

'No, but how did you know I was going to be on this boat?'

'I followed you.'

'Ooh. What a cheap trick. Followed me.'

'Well, I had to see you.'

'You didn't have to follow me. You could have called me again.'

'Then I'd have missed you. You left your house a short time after you got my message.'

'It was your message. I thought it was.'

'Yes, it was my message. Do you want to sit down?'

'Not particularly.'

'I do.'

'I'd rather stand. Aren't you afraid people will know you?'

'Who, for instance? Those Italians? They look like friends of mine?'

'You never can tell.'

'Anyway, there they go,' said Liggett. 'Now listen to me for five minutes, will you please?'

'I'll sit down now. I'm weak.'

'Why?'

'Well, the way you suddenly appear.'

'Been on the boat since five-thirty.'

'You kill me.'

'Here. Do you want to sit here?' he said. 'Now look here -'

'Oh, no, thanks. I don't want any of those now look he discussions.'

'I'm sorry. How shall I begin?'

'Are you all right? I mean after the fight? I thought you'd be hurt pretty badly.'

'I may have a rib kicked loose.'

'Well, don't fool around with that, then. I knew a boy had a rib kicked loose in football and finally it punctured his lung.'

'You wouldn't want that to happen to me, would you?'

'No. Whether you believe it or not, I wouldn't.'

'Why not? Simple humanitarian instincts or what?'

'No. Better than that. Or worse.'

'What?'

'I love you.'

'Aw-haw. That's a laugh.'

'I know.'

'What makes you think you love me?'

'I don't know. Nothing makes me think I love you. It's closer than that. It isn't as far away from me as something making me think I love you. It's knowing that I do love you. I don't expect you to believe it, but it's true.'

'I beg your pardon. Have a cigarette.'

'Oh, how nice. American cigarettes. There's a big fine if you're caught smuggling them into Massachusetts.'

'Don't kid.'

'All right.'

He reached for her hand, but she would not let him hold it.
'No. You wanted to talk. Talk, then.'

'All right,' he said. 'Well, in the first place, I've left my wife

Or rather – I don't know how to put it. Technically I *have* left my wife –'

'Permanently?'

'Permanently? Why, yes. Of course permanently.'

'Of course permanently,' she repeated. 'As a matter of fact you don't know whether it's permanently or not. I can tell by your tone, you haven't even thought about that phase of it.'

'No, I guess I haven't figured it out by months and days and years. Are you cold?'

'Yes. But we'll stay here.'

'You don't have to be nasty about it. I merely asked.'

'I'm sorry.'

'Well, to get back to the subject. My wife and I have split up. Permanently. I told her about you ~'

'Why did you do that?'

'I didn't mention your name.'

'That isn't what I meant. Why did you tell her before you told me?'

'I didn't have much chance to tell you, remember.'

'Even so you should have told me. You should have waited. What did you do that for? I'm not a home-wrecker. You have children. It's the worst kind of luck to break up a home. You should have told me first.'

'I don't see what difference that would have made. It had nothing to do with the facts.'

'What facts? You mean my sleeping with you? Did you tell her I slept with you in your apartment? Did you?'

'Yes.'

'Oh, you fool. You awful fool. Oh. Oh. Oh, Liggett. Why did you do that? You poor man. Ah, kiss me.'

He kissed her. She put her hand on the back of his neck. 'What else did you do? What else did you tell her?' she said.

'I told her everything except your name.'

'What did she say?'

'Well, I didn't give her much chance to say anything. I told her I loved you.'

'Yes. And didn't she ask you my name? No, she wouldn't want to know that. She'll find out soon enough, I suppose.'

'I didn't want to tell her your name. I wouldn't have if she'd asked me.'

'She wouldn't be in any hurry to know that now. What are her plans?'

'I'm not sure. I told her I'd give her a divorce in New York if he wanted it. I'd give her grounds.'

Gloria laughed. 'You already have.'

'That's exactly what she said.'

'Is she going to accept your kind offer?'

'I think she plans to go to Reno.'

'Why go to all that expense? Get her to get one in New York. I'll be the unidentified woman in the lace negligée.'

'No. Reno's better.'

'It's expensive. It costs a lot of money to go to Reno, so I'm told.'

'But I think she wants to go to Reno, so whatever she wants to do is all right with me, except we'll have to have some arrangement about my seeing the children.'

'How old are they?'

'Ruth, the older one, she's going on sixteen, or maybe she is sixteen, and the younger one, Barbara, she's two years younger.'

'Yes, I remember now. You did tell me. But that's not so good. Isn't the older one going to have a coming-out party?'

'I doubt it like hell. Those things cost. Two years ago, yes. But not this year, or next year.'

'Next year we're going to have a revolution.'

'Where do you get that kind of talk? Revolution. In this country? We might have a Democrat president, but — or is that what you mean by revolution.'

'I mean bloody revolution. Heads on staffs or staves or whatever you call them. Pikes. Your head, for instance. All the rich. Your head and a straw hat with a Racquet Club band on it. That's the way they're going to tell which heads to cut off. Dekes, Psi U's, Racquet Club, Squadron A.'

'Will you marry me?' he said.

'I was trying to get your mind off that. You don't have to feel you're bound to ask me that.'

'It's pretty obvious that I'm not doing this because I have to. It's because I want to. Do you *want* to get married?'

'To you, yes, but —'

'There are no buts. If you want to, we will. There isn't any other consideration.'

'On the contrary, there are thousands of other considerations, but they don't matter.'

'That's what I meant.'

'No, it isn't. But we won't argue the point. Yes, I'll marry you. You get the divorce fixed up and all that and I'll marry you and I'll be a good wife, too.'

'I know you will.'

'Oh, not for the reason you think. You think because I've been around like a man and I'm ready to settle down. That's not the real reason why I'll be a good wife.'

'Isn't it?'

'Absolutely not. Do you want to know the real reason? Because it's born in me. My mother. I was thinking today what a wonderful wife she was to my father, and still is after all these years. In a way, of course you're right. Living the kind of life I've led then finding out that there's only one life for a woman. I know you'd rather not have me mention the kind of life I've led, but I can't just pretend it never existed.'

'Where's your stateroom?'

'It's on my key. Where's yours? I'd rather go to yours.'

He told her how to get to his. 'I'll go down now,' he said.

'I'll be down in five minutes,' she said.

In his stateroom he thought what an awful place it was to bring her to. Then when she knocked on his door he was embarrassed some more. He sat on the lower berth and she faced him and he put his arms around her at the hips. Here she was, just under her clothes, standing with her hands holding the upper berth and ready for anything he wanted.

'No!' she said.

'What?'

'I don't want you to,' she said.

'You will,' he said. 'Sit down.'

'No, darling.' She sat down on the berth beside him.

'What's the matter?' he said.

'I don't know.'

'Yes, you do. What is it?'

She looked half way around the tiny stateroom and then brought her head back to looking straight ahead.

'Oh,' he said. 'But it won't always be like this.'

'But I don't want it ever to be like this, ever again. Not even now.'

'Then we can go to your room,' he said.

'No. It isn't much better. It's bigger, but not better. It's still a dirty little stateroom on the *City of Essex*.'

'Only for tonight,' he said. 'I want you so much. I love you, Gloria.'

'Yes, and I love you even more. Ah, no. Look. Look at that bed. Those sheets. They weight a ton. Damp. Cold. And we can't both stand up at the same time in this room. Oh, the whole thing. Like a travelling salesman and his chippy.'

'You're no chippy, and I'm not a travelling salesman. We're as good as married now. Signing a lot of papers won't make us more so.'

'Yes, it will. Not signing the papers, but what the papers imply will. I'm going up to get some air and then to my room. Do you want to come along?'

'To your room?'

'No. On deck. I won't stay with you tonight, on this boat. If you don't want to come with me, all right, darling. I'll see you in the morning. When we get off the boat we can go to a hotel and I'll go right to bed with you. But not here.'

'Mm.'

'It isn't scruples. You know that. It's just so God-damned -'

'Cheap and vulgar, I suppose. You're a fine one to talk.'

'I know. That's just it. Good night. If you don't want to see me in the morning, all right. Good night.'

He did not answer, and she left. He sat there, hating her for a moment, for the truth was he wanted her in this room almost as much as he wanted her at all. The very smallness of the room would make it good, like being in a box. It would be new.

And then he began to see what she meant. He was sorry for what he had said (but knew he could make it up). What he wanted to do was to see her before she went to bed, tell her he was sorry, and tell her she was right about the room. She was no common tart, and she had a right to object to lying on his bed. He put on his vest and coat and left the room.

The sounds that the boat made muffled the heavy thump of his feet on the deck. That was the only way he knew how noisy the boat was. Ordinarily he made a lot of noise walking, but the big pistons that turned the side wheels, and the wheels themselves, and the nose of the *City of Essex* pushing into the water, and the rather stiff offshore breeze – it wasn't sail, 'Jeep,' he said, when he meant to say Gee. The breeze filled his mouth and made him gulp.

One deck, two decks, and no Gloria. He saw a sign hanging from a cord, Passengers Not Allowed on Top Deck After 8 p.m. That's where she would be.

He climbed over the cord and the sign and walked slowly up the stairs. There was no need to proceed quietly. Apparently every passenger had gone to bed and it was Liggett's guess that no deck-hand would be at work on the *City of Essex* at this hour.

At the top of the steps he could see only the outline of the wheel house, and the *City of Essex's* single stack and some ventilators. There was one short string of light on the shore, and it was all dark otherwise. Then he saw Gloria, he guessed it was Gloria, sitting on the dining-saloon roof. She turned at that moment and saw him, her eyes having become better accustomed to the darkness. She got up and ran forward. Then she stopped and looked around.

'Oh, all right,' he called, and turned and started down the stairway. Half way down he heard a scream, or thought he heard a scream. He ran down the few remaining steps, and this time he knew he heard a scream. He looked down at the water just in time to see Gloria getting sucked in by the side wheel. Then the boat stopped.

'There was nothing I could do,' said Liggett to nobody.

Chapter 10

THERE is not much room between the blades of the side wheels and the housing that covers each wheel. It was half an hour before they got what was left of Gloria out from between the blade and the housing, and nobody wanted to do it then. If she had fallen overboard abaft the housing she would have been shot away from

the *City of Essex* by the force of the wheel, but where she fell was just forward of the housing, and there is a tremendous suck there. The *City of Essex* is always pulling in floating timber and dead dogs and orange peel, and sometimes when the wheel makes its turn the stuff is kicked out again. Sometimes not. The men in the wheel-house heard the second scream and signalled to stop. By that time Gloria was caught by the blades and was pulled up into the housing, counter-clockwise, in one long crush. She probably was killed the first time a blade batted her on the skull, by the same blade that pulled her up into the housing. There was no place in her body where there was a length of bone unbroken more than five inches. One A.B. fainted when he saw what he was going to have to do. The captain of the *City of Essex*, Anthony W. Parker, had only seen one thing like it before in his life, and that was a man in the black gang of the old *Erma* when the *Erma's* boiler burst off Nantucket in 1911. Captain Parker directed the removal of the woman's body from the wheel. He and two A.B.s entered the housing from inside the boat. The A.B.s carried an ordinary army blanket. One of the A.B.s accepted a slug of brandy from the captain's flask; the other man was going to take one, but he decided he could work better without it. They put the blanket over the body first, then gently rolled the body over and into the blanket. Captain Parker helped them carry the body inside the hull. 'Go on back and see if you can find the other hand,' said Captain Parker. 'She may have been wearing a ring. Have to find out who she is.' The search for the other hand was unsuccessful.

'Keep that covered up,' said Captain Parker, when the blanket fell open. 'Go on back with you,' he said, to the engine room crew who had collected.

The chief steward was called and he sent for one of the stewardesses, a middle-aged Negress. She screamed and was hard to manage, and it took five minutes for them to persuade her to examine just the girl's clothing, which they showed her by lifting a corner of the blanket. It took ten more minutes to get some answer out of her, and then she said yes, she recognized the dress, and gave the number of Gloria's stateroom. The captain sent someone there, and the someone returned, saying it must be her, her bed hadn't been slept in and the room didn't look occupied.

'She only come aboard to do the Dutch act,' said Captain

Parker. It was a hell of a thing. A young girl. Probably in the family way. The thought never crossed his mind that it was anything but suicide. A young girl, maybe eighteen, maybe twenty-one, according to the stewardess, who came on board alone, ate alone, according to the chief steward (who remembered her come to think of it, after hearing the stewardess describe her; and was corroborated by the purser), and was not seen talking to anyone. Captain Parker had to make a complete report for the owners and for the port authorities in New York and Massachusetts. Some assistant district attorney that wanted to get his name in the paper probably would be down snooping around and trying to make something of it. But here was one case of premeditated suicide and no two ways about it. It was too bad she didn't jump off the stern, but if you wanted to die that much it probably didn't make much difference which way you did it. Captain Parker hoped for her sake she got one on the skull when she was drawn in, otherwise it was a terrible death, judging from the looks of her. A terrible death. Well, girls got themselves in the family way these days irregardless of all the ways they had now that they didn't use to have to keep from getting that way. Captain Parker wondered whether he ought to say the Lord's Prayer over the body, but he looked around at his officers and men, and no, no Lord's Prayer in front of them. Fanchette, one of the A.B.s, from Pawtucket, had crossed himself when he saw the body. That was enough. If the girl's family wanted to, they could have a service and all the prayers they wanted.

The *City of Essex* resumed her trip, and the next morning in port the passengers were asked to give their names and addresses before leaving the ship. Otherwise to most of the passengers the trip was as usual, and many left the boat unaware of what had occurred. Liggett had one awful moment when he almost forgot to write Walter Little instead of his real name. He took a taxi from the pier to the railroad station and from there took the first train to New York.

the *City of Essex* by the force of the wheel, but where she fell was just forward of the housing, and there is a tremendous suck there. The *City of Essex* is always pulling in floating timber and dead dogs and orange peel, and sometimes when the wheel makes its turn the stuff is kicked out again. Sometimes not. The men in the wheel-house heard the second scream and signalled to stop. By that time Gloria was caught by the blades and was pulled up into the housing, counter-clockwise, in one long crush. She probably was killed the first time a blade batted her on the skull, by the same blade that pulled her up into the housing. There was no place in her body where there was a length of bone unbroken more than five inches. One A.B. fainted when he saw what he was going to have to do. The captain of the *City of Essex*, Anthony W. Parker, had only seen one thing like it before in his life, and that was a man in the black gang of the old *Erma* when the *Erma's* boiler burst off Nantucket in 1911. Captain Parker directed the removal of the woman's body from the wheel. He and two A.B.s entered the housing from inside the boat. The A.B.s carried an ordinary army blanket. One of the A.B.s accepted a slug of brandy from the captain's flask; the other man was going to take one, but he decided he could work better without it. They put the blanket over the body first, then gently rolled the body over and into the blanket. Captain Parker helped them carry the body inside the hull. 'Go on back and see if you can find the other hand,' said Captain Parker. 'She may have been wearing a ring. Have to find out who she is.' The search for the other hand was unsuccessful.

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'She only come aboard to do the Dutch act,' said C. A. ...

that he was leaning forward in his seat so that the train would hurry and he could spill it all to Emily.

Now there was Emily. Always before there had been Emily and always would be. He thought away from that, the way on a train you think away from things. A good thought comes and is the big thing in your mind, but it sticks there and the click of the car wheels over the joints, especially on lines that use go-pound and other light rail, lulls you to sleep with your eyes open, the thought sticking in your mind, then forgotten, supplanted by another thought.

Thus the thought of Emily, giving way to the thought of what happened last night. He could see it all, including what he had missed. When Gloria ran and he called to her, he believed she could hear his voice, the angry tone, but not the words; and so she ran again when he called, 'Oh, all right.' She was headed for the stairway on the port side, behind the wheel house but pretty far forward, hoping to get away from him by running down the stairs. But in the darkness and on account of the motion of the ship she ran smack into the rail, which is extremely low on the top deck of the *City of Essex*. She most likely hit the rail just below or just about at her knees. The forward throw of the upper part of her body – and she fell into the water. The scream, and then the second scream, and he knew he could not save her, knew it the fraction of a second after he comprehended what was happening. Well, he could have died with her.

He would tell it all to Emily. Yes, he knew he was afraid not to tell her. If she told him to go to the police and tell what happened, he would do it. But he would not tell them without being told to do it. Yes, he knew he hoped she would tell him not to go to the police.

At Grand Central he went through the passage and up the steps to the Biltmore, got his key, went to his room, came down and paid his bill. Back to the Grand Central, he gave the bag to a Red Cap (he did not want anyone to see him carrying it). He told the Red Cap to check the bag and bring him the check. He bought the afternoon papers. The story was on the front pages of the *Journal* and the *Telegram* – the *World-Telegram*, they were calling it now, and it looked like something they got out during a printer's strike. There was nothing in the *Evening Post*, the paper Emily read. The

Chapter II

THE trip to New York was old, old scenery for Liggett – the years in prep school and college and at Harvard and on leave during the war and visiting Emily at Hyannisport. But he never took his eyes off the scenery, old or not. There comes one time in a man's life, if he is unlucky and leads a full life, when he has a secret so dirty that he knows he never will get rid of it. (Shakespeare knew this and tried to say it, but he said it just as badly as anyone ever said it. 'All the perfumes of Arabia' makes you think of all the perfumes of Arabia and nothing more. It is the trouble with all metaphors where human behaviour is concerned. People are not ships, chess men, flowers, race horses, oil paintings, bottles of champagne, excrement, musical instruments, or anything else but people. Metaphors are all right to give you an idea.)

Liggett thought he knew what had happened, and he called himself a murderer. Then he stopped calling himself a murderer, because he began to like it, and this was no time to like what you were calling yourself. A murderer is a man in an opera box with a black cape and a dirk; a man with a .38 automatic and an unfaithful wife; a man in leather chaparejos with many conchos, and a Marlin rifle. It is a hard thing to get away from the thinking you do as a boy, when you learn that a murderer is a noble criminal. You have to unlearn it. Liggett had seen one murder in his life. In France. He had seen many men killed, and some in hand-to-hand fighting, but only one murder. One of his men was fighting a German and getting the best of the German, with the German beginning to bend over backward against the trench. The American could easily have taken care of the German, but one of Liggett's sergeants, taking his time about it, came up and fired his pistol twice into the German's ear. That was murder. And in his way the sergeant was a murderer. He belonged to the long line of murderers and not of warriors. Gang killings were murder.

It was a reprehensible thing, but murderers bore some relation to history. What he had done bore no relation to history, and never would. He hoped it never would. He didn't want it to. He hated having this secret but he wanted no one else to have it – and knew

that he was leaning forward in his seat so that the train would hurry and he could spill it all to Emily.

Now there was Emily. Always before there had been Emily and always would be. He thought away from that, the way on a train you think away from things. A good thought comes and is the big thing in your mind, but it sticks there and the click of the car wheels over the joints, especially on lines that use go-round and other light rail, lulls you to sleep with your eyes open, the thought sticking in your mind, then forgotten, supplanted by another thought.

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Journal had a headline: MYSTERY DEATH N.Y. GIRL IN L.I. SOUND. The story was to the effect that mystery surrounded the death of Gloria Wandrous, 18, brunette, pretty, and her leap to death from the *City of Essex*. She was identified by *her clothing!*

Liggett read no more. What about Emily's coat? Where in God's name was that coat? If Gloria had kept it at home it would be easy to identify it. The police never had any trouble identifying a thing like that, an expensive mink coat. They would go right to Emily. It was all right for her, but where was her husband that night? What was her coat doing in Miss Wandrous's apartment or house? Did she know Miss Wandrous? Did she know of her husband's relations with Miss Wandrous? Was she shielding her husband? Where was her husband that night? Then that cop in the speakeasy. He would make a report. The bartender would see it in the papers and he would comment on it to the cop, and the cop would report that the girl had had trouble with a man's attentions the Tuesday before she killed herself - *if* she killed herself. Then the people in the speakeasy the night he introduced himself to Gloria. They were the kind of people who revelled in anything like inside information when there was a scandal. 'Did you read about poor Gloria? Gloria Wandrous? Yes. Why, yes. Why, we were with her and what's his name, Weston Liggett, at Duilio's the other night. Isn't it awful? The poor kid. I thought Liggett had taken quite a shine to her.' Then there was that kid, Brunner. Just a friend, Gloria had said, but a friend would be worse now than a lover. All her lovers were checking their alibis for last night, and they would be only too glad to keep out of the whole thing, but not a friend. Liggett went home.

He still had his key and he let himself in. The maid answered his questions: No, there had been no callers or telephone messages; yes, Mrs Liggett was out and would be back around three o'clock. She was shopping, the maid said.

Liggett chain-smoked cigarettes and poured himself a drink but could not drink anything but water. Then he sat down and wrote Emily a note. 'Emily,' he wrote. 'Please meet me at "21" at four o'clock. This is terribly important and I beg of you to come. W.' Then he called Lockheed, next in charge at the office, and told Lockheed he had been ill - 'confidentially I've been on my semi-annual bender' - and Lockheed said everything was under control,

no messages of any importance, he would send up bids on the Brooklyn job for Liggett's approval, but it didn't look like they would get the contract as old John McCoocy was sore about something. . . .

Liggett had had an idea. He would go to Brunner and ask him quite frankly whether he knew anything about the fur coat. He was sure Brunner did know about the coat. It was the kind of thing Gloria would regret doing, and she would discuss it with a friend. And Liggett believed it possible for Gloria to have a friend. He believed Brunner was her friend. He had had a girl the other night. Not bad, either; and a man who was having an affair with Gloria wouldn't be likely to bring along an attractive girl. Anyway, Liggett's plan was to tell Brunner he had read about Gloria, how sorry he was, how much he loved Gloria. He might even go so far as to say he and Gloria planned to get married, but he would have to be careful how he did that. He would have to be ready to say that now that she was dead, there was no use having a lot of trouble - two young girls - the coat. If he knew how to get the coat or where it was, he was sure that was what Gloria would want done.

Liggett found the address in the telephone book, and went there by subway and on foot. Brunner, thank God, was in. He recognized Liggett, which encouraged Liggett but also put some worry in reserve.

'Mr Brunner, I don't know whether you remember me,' said Liggett.

'Yes. Mr Liggett. What can I do for you?'

'Well - no, thanks. I've been smoking too much all day. I guess you know why I came.'

'I imagine something about Gloria. You knew she -'

'I just saw it in the afternoon papers,' said Liggett. 'I don't know how to start. You were her best friend, she told me.'

'Guess so.'

'Did she tell you about us, about our plans?'

'Well, I knew you were having an affair,' said Eddie. Eddie stood up. 'Listen, did you come here about that God-damn coat? Because if you did, there it is. Take it and stick it. I don't want you coming here with a long face and all you're worried about is are you going to get mixed up in a public scandal. You want the coat,

so take it. I'm sure I don't want it. She didn't want it either. The only reason she took the God damn thing was because you tore the clothes off her. Guys like you put her where she is today. I wouldn't be surprised if you were the real -' The doorbell rang.

'Who's that?'

'Probably a friend of mine.' Eddie pushed the release button and then poked his head out and looked down the hall. 'Who is it?'

'Mr Brunner? My name is Malloy and I would like to talk to you spare a minute of your time I'd like to ask you a few spare if you -'

'Talk sense, what do you want? Oh, it's *you*.'

'I think I'll run along,' said Liggett.

'All right,' said Eddie. 'I'll send you those drawings. Where do you want them? Home or your office?'

'Uh - home, if it isn't too much trouble,' said Liggett.

'Just as much trouble to send it home as to your office,' said Eddie. 'Good day, sir.'

'May I come in?' said Malloy.

'Not if you're going to get tough you can't.'

'Oh-h, I remember you.'

'Yeah, you oughta,' said Eddie. 'Well, what do you want? Are you looking for a piano player?'

'No, this is business. I'm a reporter. From the *Herald Tribune*.'

'Oh.'

'Well, it's a living. Or was till today. I think this may be my last assignment, so help me out, will you? I got drunk yesterday on the Crowley story. Jesus, did they shoot up that place! You know the story?'

'I haven't been out to get a paper.'

'Two-Gun Crowley? They got him yesterday. They had the whole Police Department up there, Ninetieth Street, West Side. Crowley and another guy and Crowley's girl.'

'Oh, did they kill him?'

'No, not him. But he'll burn. Whenever you kill a cop you burn. When two lines intersect the vertical angles are equal, and when somebody kills a cop they burn, and when I get excited on a story I usually get stewed. I told them I got some tear gas, but I didn't get away with it.'

'Tell me some more about yourself, mister.'

'No, not now. Some other time. Maybe tomorrow. I came here to ask you about this Gloria Wandrous. You were a pretty good friend of hers, weren't you? You were, weren't you?'

'Not the way you mean.'

'Well, that's what I want to know. Who was? I want to get a line on her friends. I'm not writing the story. I'm just what they call digging up facts. Me digging up facts, for Christ's sake. I write. I'm not a digger.'

'You're an artist.'

'In my way. So are you. You probably think you're a good painter. Another George Luks or uh, Picasso, to name two. The only two I can think of.'

'Listen, Bud, if it's all the same to you.'

'Well, when did you last see Miss Wandrous?'

'About a week ago. No, I saw her Sunday night.'

'Mm. That's very funny. Then it couldn't have been you having lunch with her only yesterday at the Brevoort. She left first and you took a bus uptown. But of course if you say so.'

'Are you going to put this in the paper?'

'That's what I'm supposed to be, a reporter.'

'Well, then you'd better get it straight.'

'I won't get it straight if you hold out on me or lie. Listen, is this the first time you were ever interviewed by the working press? If it is, let me tell you something. The rest of the boys will be here in a little while. The *Trib* isn't a scandal sheet so you'll get a better break telling me the truth than telling me a lie. If you tell me the truth I'll know what to print. But if you start telling those boys from the tabs lies they'll have you tied in knots. They're real reporters. I'm not. I'm the kind of reporter that wants to be a dramatic critic, but those babies will tear this place upside down -'

'And where will the police be while all this is going on?'

'Probably outside to see that you don't get away. There's one guy on this story that was born in this neighbourhood, and he knows all the angles. Now you come across with some straight talk and then I'll give you a lift uptown. Was she depressed when I saw her yesterday?'

'Yes.'

'Why?'

'She didn't tell me. I thought she had spring fever.'

'She didn't give you any hint of why she was depressed?'

'Nope.'

'Was she pregnant?'

'Liss-senn.'

'Who was she that way about? Quite a few, I gather, but which one in particular?'

'Nobody that I know of.'

'Was she married?'

'No. I'm pretty sure of that.'

'Now here's one you won't like. Is it true she took dope?'

'No, not since I knew her.'

'How long is that?'

'Two years.'

'Well, she didn't tell you everything. She took dope all right. What about her relations with her mother and uncle? What about that uncle, by the way?'

'They seemed to get along all right. The uncle gave her a lot of money, or as much as they could afford. She had a good allowance and she always wore good clothes. That's all.'

'One more question. Did she ever speak of suicide to you?'

'Sure. The way everybody does. I speak of it. Even you I imagine.'

'But specifically, jumping off the *City of Essex*. Did she say anything about that yesterday at lunch? Or any other time? What I'm trying to get at is, was suicide on her mind?'

'No, I wouldn't say it was.'

'That's what I think. There's something screwy about this whole thing. I've read enough detective stories to know that a young girl, pretty and all that, she doesn't pack her bag the way Gloria did just to knock herself off. That was a love trip, if you don't mind my saying so. One more question, Mr Brunner.'

'You said that a minute ago.'

'This is important. I just want to show you I'm not a complete dope. Have you been in communication with the family since yesterday?'

'No. I tried to get them by phone but they wouldn't answer. I guess the phone --'

'Has been disconnected. I thought you'd say that. And so has

yours been disconnected. And you weren't out to get a paper today. So how do you know about this?

'Say, you're not trying to -'

'Just giving you a sample of what you'll get from the boys and girls on the tabloids. Multiplied by fifty and you have an idea.'

'Well, my phone isn't disconnected, so you're wrong.'

'Yes, and you're lying. Oh, don't worry. I don't think you did it. Come on, I'll take you away from the wolves.'

'Will they really break open the apartment?'

'Oh, probably not. I'm just taking you uptown as a friendly act. They aren't interested in you as much as in some elderly guy. That's all I know about him, and that's all they know. He was part of her past. A very big part, I should say. Coming?'

'All right.'

'I'll buy you a drink. Jesus, guy, you don't think I like this, do you? Have you heard any of the new Louis Armstrong records?'

'No new ones. What ever happened to the little dame you had that played the piano?'

'Married. That's what we all ought to do. You too.'

'I'm going to.'

'I have a novel almost finished. As soon as I finish it and get the dough I'll stay on the wagon three months. You better lock your windows just in case.'

Chapter 12

'I'm preparing a paper on New York newspapers,' said Joab Ellery Reddington. 'Will you reserve a copy of all the papers for me every day?'

'Yes, sir. We don't get them all, but I can order them for you if you tell me how long you'll want them.'

'A month. Shall I pay you every day?'

'That'll be all right,' said the newsdealer.

And so every afternoon Dr Reddington would go from his office in the high school building, down to the railroad station to his office. He would open each paper so that the find-

'She didn't tell me. I thought she had spring fever.'

'She didn't give you any hint of why she was depressed?'

'Nope.'

'Was she pregnant?'

'Liss-senn.'

'Who was she that way about? Quite a few, I gather, but which one in particular?'

'Nobody that I know of.'

'Was she married?'

'No. I'm pretty sure of that.'

'Now here's one you won't like. Is it true she took dope?'

'No, not since I knew her.'

'How long is that?'

'Two years.'

'Well, she didn't tell you everything. She took dope all right. What about her relations with her mother and uncle? What about that uncle, by the way?'

'They seemed to get along all right. The uncle gave her a lot of money, or as much as they could afford. She had a good allowance and she always wore good clothes. That's all.'

'One more question. Did she ever speak of suicide to you?'

'Sure. The way everybody does. I speak of it. Even you I imagine.'

'But specifically, jumping off the *City of Essex*. Did she say anything about that yesterday at lunch? Or any other time? What I'm trying to get at is, was suicide on her mind?'

'No, I wouldn't say it was.'

'That's what I think. There's something screwy about this whole thing. I've read enough detective stories to know that a young girl, pretty and all that, she doesn't pack her bag the way Gloria did just to knock herself off. That was a love trip, if you don't mind my saying so. One more question, Mr Brunner.'

'You said that a minute ago.'

'This is important. I just want to show you I'm not a complete dope. Have you been in communication with the family since yesterday?'

'No. I tried to get them by phone but they wouldn't answer. I guess the phone -'

'Has been disconnected. I thought you'd say that. And'

yours been disconnected. And you weren't out to get a paper today. So how do you know about this?'

'Say, you're not trying to -'

'Just giving you a sample of what you'll get from the boys and girls on the tabloids. Multiplied by fifty and you have an idea.'

'Well, my phone isn't disconnected, so you're wrong.'

'Yes, and you're lying. Oh, don't worry. I don't think you did it. Come on, I'll take you away from the wolves.'

'Will they really break open the apartment?'

'Oh, probably not. I'm just taking you uptown as a friendly act. They aren't interested in you as much as in some elderly guy. That's all I know about him, and that's all they know. He was part of her past. A very big part, I should say. Coming?'

'All right.'

'I'll buy you a drink. Jesus, guy, you don't think I like this, do you? Have you heard any of the new Louis Armstrong records?'

'No new ones. What ever happened to the little dame you had that played the piano?'

'Married. That's what we all ought to do. You too.'

'I'm going to.'

'I have a novel almost finished. As soon as I finish it and get the dough I'll stay on the wagon three months. You better lock your windows just in case.'

Chapter 12

'I'm preparing a paper on New York newspapers,' said Joab Ellery Reddington. 'Will you reserve a copy of all the papers for me every day?'

'Yes, sir. We don't get them all, but I can order them for you if you tell me how long you'll want them.'

'A month. Shall I pay you every day?'

'That'll be all right,' said the newsdealer.

And so every afternoon Dr Reddington would go from his office in the high school building, down to the railroad station, and back to his office. He would open each paper so that the financial page

was on the outside, and he would sit and read every word about the Wandrous case. With fear and trembling he watched the beginning, the growth, and the decline in references to an older man, a middle-aged man, an elderly man. Dr Reddington still had in cash the money he was going to pay Gloria for her promise never to mention his name, and he carried this money with him all the time. He never knew when he was going to have to use it. He did not know where he would go, but he would go somewhere. Then one, then two, then all the papers described the man. A Major in the Ordnance Department during the War, whose name police refused to divulge. The police were good and sick of the case and only kept it open because one of the tabloids would not let it die down. The police said they only wanted the Major for questioning.

Then one day the police announced that the Major had died in 1925 of a heart attack on a train between St Louis and Chicago. The body had been cremated and the urn reposed in a Chicago funeral home. After that Dr Reddington continued to read the New York papers, but there were no more references to an elderly man, and in late August the doctor stopped the papers and joined his family, who were vacationing in New Hampshire. The Reddingtons always went to a hotel where the women guests were not permitted to smoke.



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